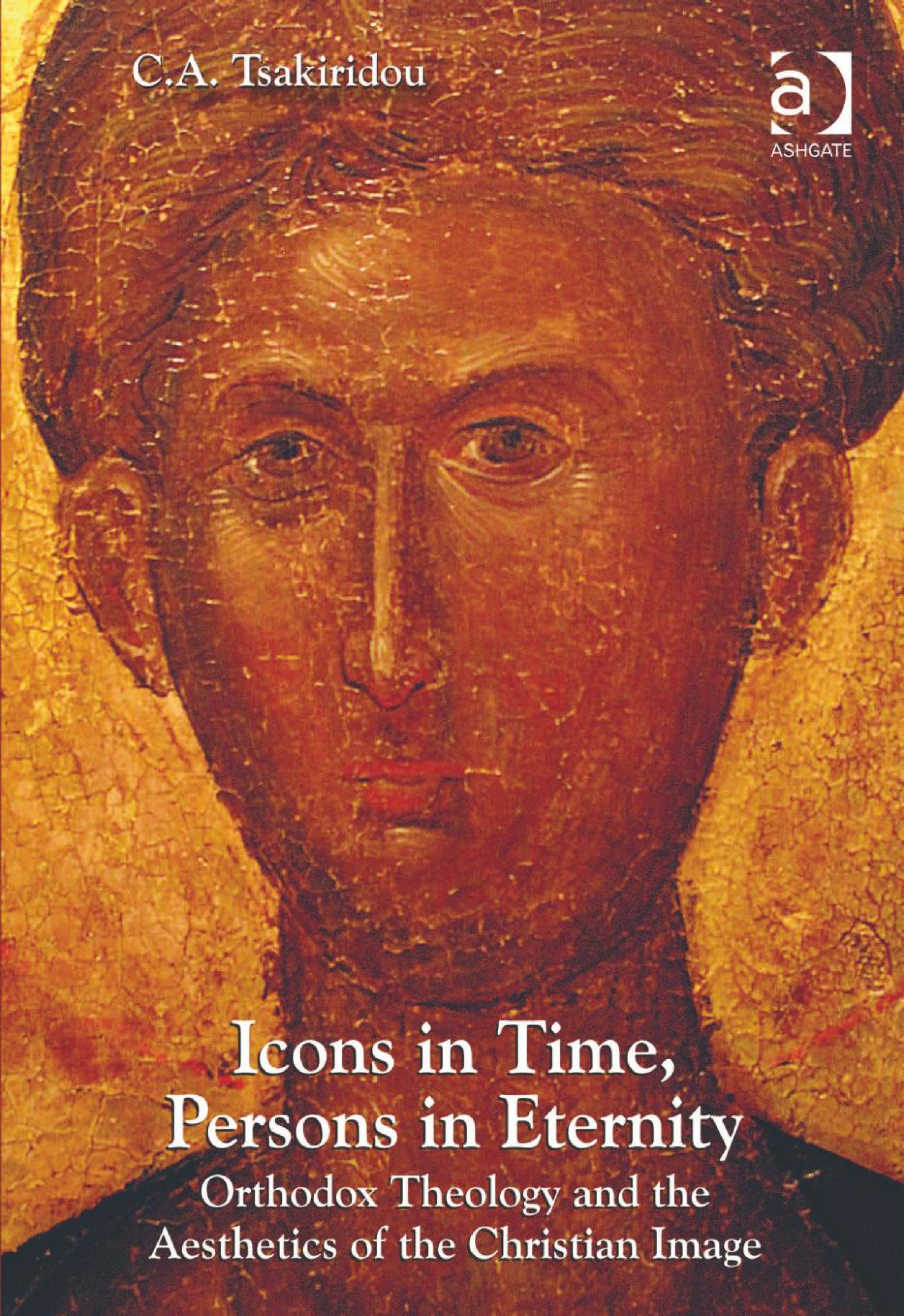


C.A. Tsakiridou

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Icons in Time, Persons in Eternity

Orthodox Theology and the Aesthetics of the Christian Image

ICONS IN TIME, PERSONS IN ETERNITY

Icons in Time, Persons in Eternity presents a critical, interdisciplinary examination of contemporary theological and philosophical studies of the Christian image and redefines this within the Orthodox tradition by exploring the ontological and aesthetic implications of Orthodox ascetic and mystical theology. It finds Modernist interest in the aesthetic peculiarity of icons significant, and essential for re-evaluating their relationship to non-representational art.

Drawing on classical Greek art criticism, Byzantine *ekphraseis* and hymnography, and the theologies of St. Maximus the Confessor, St. Symeon the New Theologian and St. Gregory Palamas, the author argues that the ancient Greek concept of *enargeia* best conveys the expression of theophany and *theosis* in art. The qualities that define *enargeia*—inherent liveliness, expressive autonomy and self-subsisting form—are identified in exemplary Greek and Russian icons and considered in the context of the hesychastic theology that lies at the heart of Orthodox Christianity.

An Orthodox aesthetics is thus outlined that recognizes the transcendent being of art and is open to dialogue with diverse pictorial and iconographic traditions. An examination of Ch'an (Zen) art theory and a comparison of icons with paintings by Wassily Kandinsky, Pablo Picasso, Mark Rothko and Marc Chagall, and by Japanese artists influenced by Zen Buddhism, reveal intriguing points of convergence and difference. The reader will find in these pages reasons to reconcile Modernism with the Christian image and Orthodox tradition with creative form in art.

Cornelia A. Tsakiridou is Associate Professor, Philosophy and Director, Diplomat-in-Residence Program, at La Salle University, Philadelphia, U.S.A.

For my mother Mary G. Gavriilidou
In memory of my father Alexandros P. Tsakiridis
NYN KAI AEI

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Preface and Acknowledgments

Theology has often been construed as an obstacle to aesthetic perception. Yet, to the extent that they outline a world view, theologies imply a certain approach to the art object that goes beyond the function that art serves in worship and relates more essentially to its aesthetic being and existence. Based on this premise, this book sets the aesthetics of the Orthodox icon in a new key. Working between theological, philosophical and art critical texts from the Orthodox, Catholic, Modernist and Ch'an (Zen) traditions, it demonstrates the openness of Orthodox theology to charismatic being in art, and the ability of certain images to assume forms of theological existence which resonate with personhood and transcendence.

The book explores the ontological and aesthetic implications of theophany in Orthodox ascetic and mystical theology, especially St. Maximus the Confessor, St. Symeon the New Theologian, and St. Gregory Palamas. Departing from beauty-based interpretations that have dominated Catholic and Orthodox aesthetics, it defines the exemplary icon by the ancient Greek concept of *enargeia*, the presence in the art object of inherent liveliness, expressive autonomy and self-subsisting form. It shows that *enargeia* is uniquely fitted to express the plerotic state of human existence and nature in *theosis*, and describe the Byzantine view and experience of art. The theophanic aesthetic that it proposes entails an approach to form, color and light that recalls Modernist experiments with painting while its view of the art object is consistent with Modernism's insistence on the integrity and autonomy of the work of art. The reader will therefore find in these pages reasons to reconcile Modernism with the Christian image and Orthodox tradition with creative form in art.

From a theological standpoint, the icon will be discussed outside the restrictive context of Iconophile polemics that continue to shape contemporary interpretations of the nature and ideological functions of icons. This shift is necessary if we are to place the icon in its proper theological context, appreciate its unique aesthetic and theological being, and avoid the fallacies that have shaped its theological discussion. The tendency to theologize and idealize the Christian image despite itself implies

a disregard for its aesthetic identity and life, and the belief that there is little left to be said about it once its beauty and holiness are exalted. In reality, there is much more to the icon than these two canonical concepts would suggest. Icons in possession of their own aesthetic and semantic reality exist in the modality of persons. This notion is suggested by *enargeia*, is present in Byzantine *ekphraseis*, and is consistent with the Orthodox view of being. The concept itself has a significant aesthetic range that allows us to explore other iconographic traditions.

The comparison of Orthodox and Zen iconography is based on the aesthetic character of Zen meditation and practice, a quality that sets it apart from other religions and metaphysical systems. But it is also the result of experiencing Orthodoxy as a living and lived reality. At some point in the course of this study, it became clear to me that the theology I was encountering in books acquired a different dimension in Orthodox monastic life, where, as I came to realize, theology becomes a life-form and assumes the terse, lucid and iconic language of the counsels of the Desert Fathers and Mothers.

The affinity of this ascetical, empirical way of knowing God with aesthetic experience was not hard to see and invited a comparison with Zen painting where the image often exists as an instance of enlightenment. Why not, I thought, look for a similar modality in Christian art while standing on the premises of an Orthodox ontology? What would an image that operates as an instance of *theosis*, rather than as its representation or sign, look like? What would be its aesthetic qualities? Contrary to the contemporary tendency to find univocity in religious and aesthetic experience, what fascinated me in this case were the underlying differences between an Orthodox and a Zen aesthetic, differences not always easy to discern but all the more exciting for this reason.

A word should be said about illustrations. Most of the images included in this study are in black and white. Color plates are reserved for works that I thought are seminal to our argument. Their number is by no means what I had originally intended. This applies especially to Modernist works but also to significant photographs and Zen paintings that I wish had been reproduced here. The practical demands of a budget combined with the fees sometimes demanded, have regrettably forced me to work with fewer images, especially in color. I hope that readers will themselves be able to turn to relevant sources if they wish to pursue matters further.

The iconography of the Orthodox Church exists in icons but also in persons who live ascetic and holy lives. I am deeply indebted for their spiritual guidance and love to Elder Ephraim of St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery, Arizona, Elder Maximus of St. Dionysius Monastery, Mt. Olympus, Greece, and to Fr. Mark Andrews and Eldress Olympias of Holy Protection Greek Orthodox Monastery, Pennsylvania. I learned about the lives of icons, ancient Greek painting, and the art of Theophanes the Greek from Arch. Fr. Agathonikos Nikolaides who reminded me all along

of the openness that Orthodoxy brings to language, thought and art. The lectures of Elder Maximus on St. Maximus the Confessor still resonate in my mind every time I read this great theologian, as does the voice of Fr. Theokletos Dionysiates whose works are cited in this study. Fr. Gavriel, of Filotheou Monastery, has shared with me his photographs of Mount Athos and what his artist's eye sees in the daily lives of Athonite monks and ascetics. I am grateful to His Holiness Metropolitan of Thessaloniki Anthimos for permission to photograph and publish icons from the collection of the Ecclesiastical Museum of the Metropolis, and to Fr. Stylianos Anastasopoulos for his gracious assistance. I am indebted to Elder Paisios of St. Anthony's Monastery, Arizona for his hospitality and permission to photograph and publish the icon of St. Panteleimon.

This book benefited from the suggestions and constructive criticism of the Press readers to whom I am especially grateful. At La Salle University, I wish to thank Marc Moreau and the Provost and Dean for supporting my research-leave applications, Stephen Breedlove for his invaluable help with interlibrary research, and Rosemary Convery for her assistance with the manuscript. I wish also to thank Fr. Juan Velez and my colleagues at the American Maritain Association who over the years have given me the opportunity to learn from their work and explore Catholic theology and aesthetics. Above all, I must thank my editor, John Smedley, for taking this project from its early stages and seeing it through publication with wisdom, kindness and humor.

Finally, the support, ideas and suggestions of family, good friends and colleagues have made researching and writing this book a rewarding experience. Among them, Tatiana Andreadou, Eleni Anni, Mahmoud Ayoub, Loula Barkas, Carolina Bogdanou, Celia Capsomera, Dorothy and Norm Graham, Paul Eftychiadis, Minas Hadjiyiannis, Paul Kambouroglou, Yoshiko and Nobuhiro Kanatsuji, Fr. Kallinikos of the Monastery of Dionysiou, Mt. Athos, Mouina Karam, Christos Katsetos, Miwako Koezuka, Varvara and Alexis Kompotis, Michiko Koyanagi, Nina Liappi, Pasi Mantyla, Fr. Markellos of St. Anthony's Monastery, Arizona, Xanthoula Milka, Richard Mshomba, Yoko and Makoto Ogawa, Yoshi Ohashi, Gavriel Oulkeroglou, Glykeria Simota, Margot and Paul Soven, Stathes Trahanatzis, Titika and Vasilis Triantopoulos, George Tsakiridis, and Kaite and Sakes Zapheiriadis deserve my special gratitude.

There are persons who bring their own existence to life with a contagious joy and grace. Long before I understood what *enargeia* meant, I saw its form in my grandmother, Vaso Gavriilidou. The title of this book is very much a reflection of her memory.

PART I

PRELIMINARIES

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1

The Need to Redefine the Christian Image

> Painting is dignified by age, it is distinguished by antiquity, and is coeval with the preaching of the Gospel … these sacred representations, inasmuch as they were tokens (*sumbola*) of our immaculate faith, came into existence and flourished as did the faith from the very beginning; undertaken by the apostles, this practice received the approval of the Fathers. For just as these men instructed us in the words of divine religion, so in this respect also, acting in the same manner as those who represent in painting the glorious deeds of the past, they represent the Savior's life on earth, as it is made manifest in evangelical Scripture, and this they consigned not only to books, but also delineated on panels …[1]

These words of the Iconophile Patriarch of Constantinople (758–828), Nicephorus, were written in the midst of the second Iconoclasm in Byzantium. They were meant to persuade among others the Emperor Leo V not to banish painted images from worship. Considered from an aesthetic point of view, they carry a strange irony. They justify the existence of the Christian image by effectively undermining its art. Pictures are treated like words. They resemble documents and testaments of faith. To paint a picture of Christ is to declare that he is a real person, an incarnate God. To point at countless portraits of him is to prove that the need to depict his life is as natural and legitimate as the need to describe it. Those who love God want to see God and show him to others. The Patriarch opposed Iconoclasm but not its simplistic view of images. The Iconoclasts saw icons as little more than talismans and idols; their opponents, as little more than confessional instruments and symbols of devotion.

Yet, when Iconophile tracts like St. John Damascene's apologia for images, describe intense visual and emotional responses to icons encountered in churches and dreams, an entirely different view of the image emerges. Here icons come to life. They exist on the verge of speech. They overflow with expression. They are as vital as apparitions. Was this mere rhetoric? Or was it also a way of conveying an aesthetic reality? Were religious and aesthetic experience somehow intertwined in a way that the Byzantines could not

[1] Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453: Sources and Documents* (Toronto, 1986), pp. 175–176.

discern? Was their rhetoric the outcome of an astute aesthetic perception, a fusion of theology and form? The defense of images was a doctrinal affair and the priorities were clearly set. These "aesthetic" moments were quickly overshadowed by arguments aiming to show the absurdity of accusing the defenders of icons of idolatry.

In many ways, little has changed since. Weaved into the long history of the image in Christianity, the irony of Nicephorus' defense has become almost invisible, its form hard to discern beneath the patina of praise and adulation layered on Christian art for centuries. Today, Christian theologians and hierarchs may speak the language of art criticism and history but they have little to say about the Christian image as an aesthetic object. Beauty is a favorite concept but it is rarely used critically. In theological studies, it is treated as a metaphysical concept, a transcendental when applied to God and being, a universal when predicated of sensible things. But its use with reference to the art object itself is often metaphorical rather than descriptive.[2] Theological aesthetics works with the tension between supersensible and sensible, transcendent and immanent, but its principal subject is theology not art.[3] It is not interested in the aesthetic object itself, the plastic existent put forth by the work of art. There is little interest in how beauty is associated with the presence of holiness in things and persons. Particularly where theology tries to engage postmodern thought, the beautiful is an occasion for taking flight from the world rather than dwelling in its being or actuality.[4]

This is a book about a type of Orthodox image that embodies and realizes deified existence aesthetically. Images of this type bring what they present to a state of temporal realization, as if in showing it they are bringing it into existence and keeping it alive and present in time. But they also invite a comparison to persons because like human beings they are capable of self-presentation and enunciation. Aesthetic objects with these qualities exist also in Modernist art and in the Ch'an (Zen) schools of Buddhism but not with the same modality as their Christian equivalents. They are aesthetic beings par excellence, exemplary images.

We take the aesthetic to mean what its name suggests: that which has sensuous form as the manner of its existence. It is common today to approach the aesthetic as the converging point of multiple rationalities that

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2 For the absence of an "essential continuity between holiness and beauty" in religious art see Gerardus Van der Leeaw, *Sacred and Profane Beauty: The Holy in Art*, trans. David C. Green (New York, 1963), p. 230.

3 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* (7 vols, San Francisco, 1972). For an Eastern Orthodox perspective, see David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (New York, 2004). For perspectives on theological aesthetics, see Oleg V. Bychkov and James Fodor, *Theological Aesthetics after von Balthasar* (London, 2008). See also, Daniel B. Gallagher, "The Analogy of Beauty and the Limits of Theological Aesthetics," *Theandros: An Online Journal of Orthodox Christian Theology and Philosophy*, 3/3 (Spring/Summer 2006).

4 Hart, pp. 207–208.

take charge of the art object to pluralize and disperse it in meta-aesthetic narratives.[5] Often it is treated as a category that is irretrievably lost. Various ploys of rediscovery and substitution are proposed. Rhetorical exercises are devised in order to deconstruct it and find something inside, some sort of remnant or echo of a once real being. In my view, the aesthetic is that which presents itself as an aesthetic being or reality (*on aesthetikon*). All that we can say about it lies in this form of existence.

When one can see tension or fragility in the way that a line is drawn, one is in the presence of an aesthetic being. When a face is painted in such a way that it seems to withdraw itself from view, it exists as an aesthetic being. It is not just a picture or a work of art. It makes itself seen and noticed by virtue of its act of being itself: being a fragile line rather than one that conveys solidity (or resilience). This kind of aesthetic existence can reach different levels of complexity. When it thoroughly permeates an image, it sets it in motion. By subsisting in an act of self-expression and self-realization, it ceases to be a mere likeness and becomes a living thing, a life-form in art. It is then exemplary.

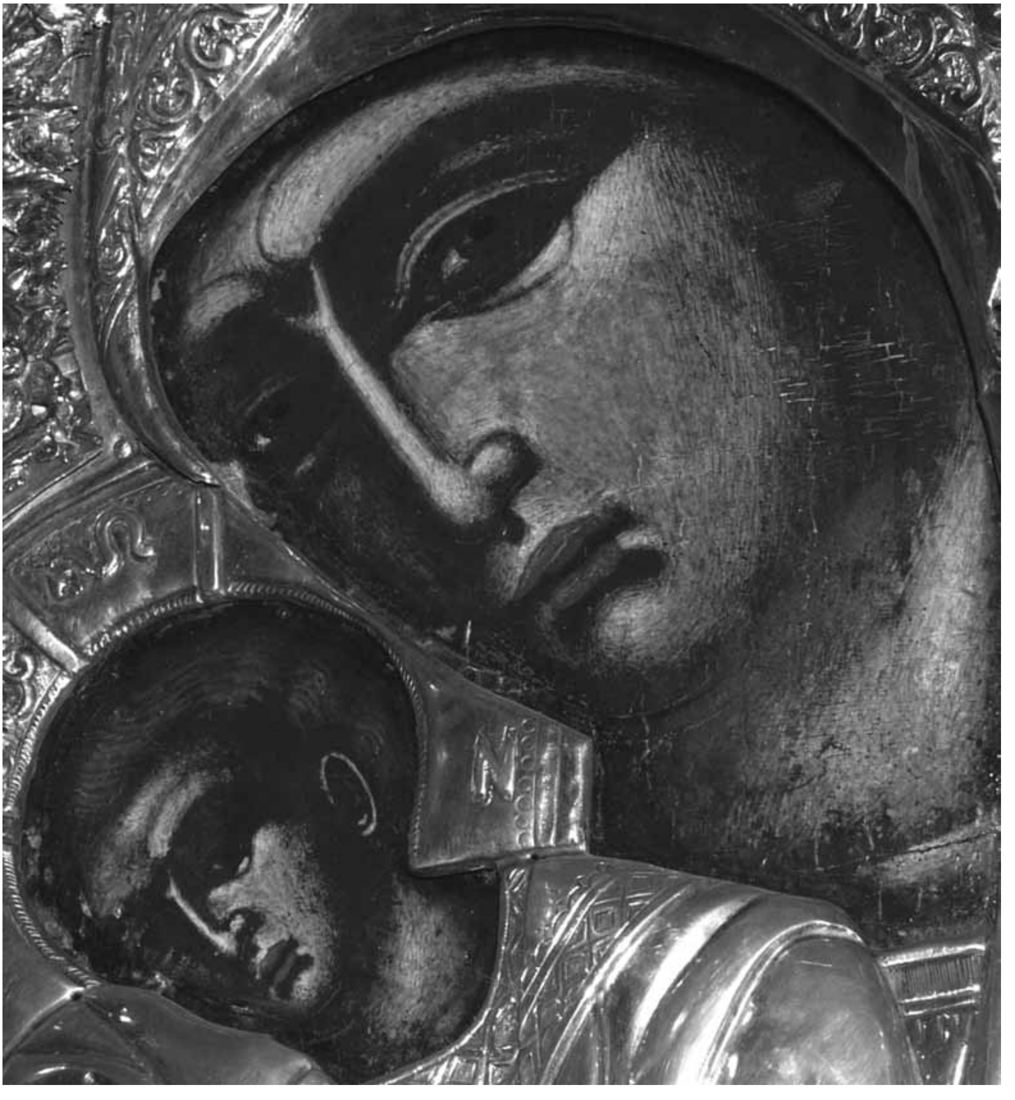
Exemplarity is in this sense the fulfillment of art (the perfection of its being). When in a picture we meet figures which stand in contained rupture, which speak through their silence, or move toward the viewer as if to open themselves to view (and yet not completely), we know right away that we are in the presence of something that commands its own reality. In that moment, it is hard to speak of an aesthetic of absence or similitude. It makes little sense to interpret or analyze the image because it speaks for itself. This is something that Chinese painters and critics, as we shall see, have known for centuries.

Icons with these qualities have always existed in the Eastern Church alongside those that seem motionless and devoid of expression. Noticing them often requires putting aside their devotional history or miraculous power (or our assumptions about "icons" and "Byzantine art") and instead engaging them directly for what they are. This is a relationship to the image that photography can sometimes enhance as it may draw an icon out of its ornate and precious encasing and by focusing on the painting itself, discover qualities that would otherwise have been overlooked.

Figure 1.1, a photograph of the miraculous icon of the *Panagia Dexia* is a copy of a celebrated sixteenth-century Cypriot original (*Panagia of Kykkou*) that was offered to the Byzantine church of St. Hypatius that stood on the same location. "Dressed" in silver, it appears smaller in scale when seen with the naked eye. It is here significantly enlarged. Expressions of austerity and tenderness but also detachment and sadness are drawn on the faces of the two figures. The use of bold, thick lines to carve out their features especially around the eyes gives them a distant and yet dramatic presence, a quality of stillness, energy and pensive tranquility in which emotion is at once released and restrained.

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5 Ibid., pp. 5–7.



1.1 *Panagia Dexia* (detail), undated, Church of Panagia Dexia, Thessaloniki, Greece



1.2 *St. Marina* (detail), undated, Monastery of St. Marina, Andros, Greece

In the next photograph (Figure 1.2), the Saint's intense and somber expression cuts through the blurring effect of light and motion. Tucked inside its silver "shirt" (*hypokamison*), the austere face seems absorbed in an act of grasping and arresting whatever may transpire in front of it and beyond it, in a space that is at once intimate and indefinite. Behind the glittering silver and gold and the flickering oil lamps and candles, the image posits its own reality, keeping watch of its own time. It makes itself present.

Photography can bring to the icon the selective vision of its lens which impresses on the image the view of the one who photographed it. But it can also open the image to its own reality by capturing its visual life. Not all icons are receptive to this approach that we may call an act of "awakening" the aesthetic object. It takes an exemplary icon to do this or at least an image in which we can see elements of *enargeia*, an expressive frequency that photography may help underscore or make focal.

Enargeia is usually translated as vividness. Where it is present, something in the art object moves or comes alive. There are Zen paintings that also have this quality, even though their type of *enargeia* and that of the exemplary Christian image differ. The word, as we shall see in Chapter 3, has a long history. It is used, among others, by Plato in the *Ion* (535bc) to describe the coming alive (*ephallomenon*, *ekphane*, *ekcheonta*) of a Homeric character on stage in an act of divinely inspired impersonation. *Enargeia* brings to the art object the dynamism that is implicit in the concept of *hypostasis*. The image exists or actualizes its own being. It brings something of itself out to view, as if to show it.[6] It "asks" to be treated as a part of life rather than its detached copy. In a Christian world, where things participate in the being of God, the image too is a participant. It has grace. If the image is Christian ontologically, it must, somehow make this visible.

The Christian image has always been seen as a participant in divine life but not in this aesthetic sense. Icons of Christ, the Virgin Mary, martyrs and saints secrete their blessings and perform miracles. The tradition dates back

6 Andrew Walker, "*Enargeia* and the Spectator in Greek Historiography," *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 123 (1993): pp. 353–377. See also Jane M.F. Heath, "Absent Presences of Paul and Christ: *Enargeia* in 1 Thessalonians 1–3," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 32/1 (2009): pp. 3–38.

to the Edessa *Mandylion*, a piece of cloth on which according to legend Christ impressed his face—known later in the West as the *Veronica* (*vera icona* or true image).[7] Like other images made without human hands (*acheiropoietai*), the *Mandylion* type legitimized Christianity's ambivalent relationship to art.

Over time, the miraculous act of self-depiction carried a mandate for reproducing the divine likeness in physical objects by human hands. It established an aesthetic of verisimilar presence and apparitional realism that emphasized intimacy with a divine original. It focused Christian vision on the person, life and teachings of Christ with an almost documentary fervor.[8] Holy beings penetrated nature and sanctified it, giving permission to art to do the same. Images of the Virgin Mary, archangels, prophets, apostles, saints, martyrs and hierarchs filled the catacombs, churches, monasteries and homes of the Christian world to affirm and celebrate both the truth and perpetuity of Christian revelation.

The image that has *enargeia* possesses a form of liveliness similar to that of the miraculous icon. It does not bleed myrrh or sweat tears. Instead it brings forth its own form, as if to make an offering of it. Christianity defines itself through great paradoxes or mysteries and on that basis claims the ontological transformation of humanity and nature. God takes human flesh, he dies and rises from the dead, he appears as uncreated light in theophany. In Christ beings are sanctified and live in holiness but this life is not always visible and it is often corrupted by the failings of nature and human choice. Still, there are moments in Christian life when sanctity can be clearly seen in those who have transformed themselves in divine union. Then everything about them becomes a witness to the presence of a Triune God in human life.

Some icons seem to capture this transformation in their own terms, aesthetically. Looking at them, we have the sense that we are in the presence of something actual and alive. There is nothing symbolic about them or suggestive of representation. Instead, they deliver directly what they show, as if they speak it or enunciate it in silence. It is not concepts or ideas that they convey but states or forms of existence. Some are pensive and still; others are quiet and sad. Their stillness is palpable because it is aesthetically delivered. It becomes a kind of theology but one that is similar to the theology conveyed by a saint, a man or woman for whom holiness is a way of life. Christian exemplarity, as we shall see, involves the presence in the plastic object of a locutionary motion, of a *logos* or voice. It is a particular form of *enargeia* that we do not, for example, find in the Zen image.

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[7] Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago, 1994), pp. 208–209.

[8] For a discussion of Christian portraiture in the Paleo-Christian period and the early Middle Ages, see André Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins, The A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1961, Bollingen Series xxxv.10* (Princeton, 1968), pp. 60–86. For miraculous icons as records of Christ's physiognomy and the concept of *eikonismos*, see Gilbert Dagron, "Holy Images and Likeness," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 45 (1991): pp. 23–33.

This is not how Christian art has been approached by Orthodox and Catholic theologians. Certainly it has been celebrated and venerated. It has also been given a theology of its own, where beauty is the principal category. But except when miraculous, icons have not been allowed to speak for themselves. In paintings featuring apostles, martyrs and saints, humility, simplicity, tranquility and the virtues that make holiness Christian are rarely in the aesthetic object itself. Trees and flowers, rivers and mountains are part of Christ's life but they do not come alive in his presence. It is easy to convey holiness by conventions of halos, crosses and physical beauty, or create visual catalogs of saints and martyrs. Byzantine iconography has its austere and emaciated ascetics; the Catholic Church its statuesque saints and monumental passion scenes. What is the aesthetic problem here? It is rather simple. Emaciation is not in and of itself sufficient to suggest holiness. Neither is robustness by itself adequate to convey the heroic nature of spiritual feats.

For all the art created in its name, Christianity does not consider aesthetic perception as a means to spiritual communion. Among the Orthodox, reverence for the holy person(s) an icon depicts and awe for its miracles and healing powers is the norm, and supplication remains the customary form of interaction. Sometimes aesthetic qualities are noticed. During long services, the eyes linger on images, objects and sounds and then aesthetic perception comes naturally. Yet, the icon is most often seen as liturgically rather than aesthetically powerful. Once included in liturgy, icons are somehow equal. The view of Archibishop Damianos of St. Catherine's Monastery, Sinai is a good example:

> … in the eyes of every Orthodox Christian, holy icons are more than artful and historical objects. They are a vital entity and a vibrant presence in the liturgical life of the Church, which is the very context that sanctioned and fostered their creation, existence and use from early Christian times.[9]

A contemporary Athonite describes his encounter with a miraculous icon of the Theotokos in vivid and sensual terms. It is an experience of holy desire. The image comes alive but as a physical being, one that breathes and fills the church with her aroma. It is as if one ran into a photograph of a loved one and the moment they laid their eyes on it, the person came alive. An icon, like a photograph, can trigger all kinds of experiences that do not include its aesthetic form.

> As I come closer, she pulls me toward her as if she were a magnet. And I need to be alone because I want to embrace her for hours. A breath of life enters my soul and filled with grace, I do not wish to leave. Love, longing (*eros*) for God, a burning fire; when the icon is miraculous, the very moment you enter the church

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[9] Archbishop Damianos, "The Icon as a Ladder of Divine Ascent in Form and Color," in Helen C. Evans (ed.), *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)* (New Haven, 2004), p. 335.

it exudes such a sweet-smelling breath that you remain ecstatic for hours, being not in yourself but in fragrant Paradise.[10]

It is unclear what the aesthetic object contributes to this experience, besides being a picture of the Virgin Mary.

In Catholic liturgy, the integral presence of art has been affected by developments in church architecture since Vatican II that emphasized community and participation over sacramental life and devotion. Yet, devotions in which statues and to a lesser degree images play a central role persist and in such instances the faithful continue to speak of miracles and acts of intense communication. As with the Orthodox, attention is not typically directed to aesthetic qualities. Works extolled and venerated for their "holiness" and "beauty" are usually painted in Renaissance or Baroque style. In more recent art, the influence of Modernism is evident but not in an aesthetically and theologically significant way. Images and statues recount Christ's life, give form to hosts of angels, to litanies of martyrs and saints, and function as visual records of feasts, calendars and the glories of the Church and its hierarchs. In most cases, the focal point of experience and interpretation is the legend of the holy personages depicted and their efficacious presence in sacred space. Where the artist is renowned or the church famous as a cultural monument, art critical considerations may also become relevant.

In descriptions of religious art, particularly in theological contexts, terms like "beauty," "holiness," "splendor," etc. are standard. They are ascribed almost unconditionally, as if they are natural attributes of the depicted figures and scenes. Questions like what makes the beauty attributed to a portrait of Christ, *Christ's beauty* rather than an ordinary man's, or how holiness takes form in the rendering of a saint's body (i.e., in the very physical qualities that constitute it as the *body of a saint* rather than the body of any man or woman), or what really defines a landscape as one permeated by Christ's presence (e.g., in which all things are integrally restored), are not raised. This is not a new phenomenon.

In Byzantium and later in the Western Renaissance, compilations of *ekphraseis* (singular *ekphrasis*)—descriptions of religious art and architecture originating in classical rhetoric—extolled the technical and dogmatic integrity of icons and their didactic and affective powers.[11] In most cases, they had little

[10] Gerondos Ioseph, *Ekphrasis Monachikes Empeirias* (Expressions of a Monastic Life) (Aghion Oros, 2003), pp. 202–203. Also quoted in Nikolaos, Metropolitan Mesogaias Laureotikes, *Phone Auras Leptes* (Voice of a Delicate Breeze) (Athens, 2006), pp. 178, 141. The translation is mine. For similar responses to relics, see Patricia Cox Miller, "'The Little Flower is Red': Relics and the Poeticizing of the Body," *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 8/2 (2000): pp. 213–236.

[11] The equivalent in Alberti (1404–1472): "The *istoria* will move the soul of the beholder when each man painted there clearly shows the movements of his own soul …." Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. John R. Spencer (New Haven, 1966), p. 67. The *Painter's Manual* or *Hermeneia* (1730–1734) catalogues formulae for the visual transcription of scriptural passages in meticulous detail, without mention of aesthetic qualities. "*Historein*" there means to depict or visually identify a subject according to its distinctive hagiographic features or traits. Dionysiou tou ek Fourna, *Ermeneia tes Byzantines Zographikes Technes* (Athens, 1987),

to say about them as aesthetic objects i.e., the influence of plastic elements such as line, color, tonality, texture, contours etc. on their meaning. By contrast, in the same period, Chinese art criticism showed a clear and in many instances profound grasp of the relationship between spiritual and aesthetic qualities in painting, calligraphy and poetry. In most Byzantine *ekphraseis*, as we shall see, it is usually extra-aesthetic elements that determine judgment. But there are also significant exceptions that reveal the more aesthetic dimension of the Byzantine relationship to images.

Artificial distinctions between a work's spiritual and aesthetic aspects are common in contemporary scholarship. According to Daniel Sahas, for example, "the Byzantine icon is not a specimen of aesthetic art but an expression of spirituality."[12] The statement implies that an icon is "spiritual" in some other way than as an art object and that it cannot be experienced as an aesthetic and spiritual object at the same time. The problem with this distinction is easy to see. If something is art and is also "spiritual," it is spiritual *as art* or *to the extent* that it is an art object (i.e., not the actual physical object made of wood, gold, tempera etc. but what is painted and shown on its surface, the aesthetic object at hand). A painting that expresses spirituality does so by putting forth a certain kind of form. In the absence of that form, nothing (spiritual) is expressed.

In addition, as Hans Belting has observed of theological writing, there is a tendency to homogenize the Christian image.[13] This is done by appealing to qualities that reflect its subject matter rather than form. An example is another passage from Sahas:

> The beauty of the liturgical art of iconography is not carnal or aesthetic. In the icon the flesh has been crucified, 'along with the passions and its desires.' Here, exactly, lies the essential difference between Byzantine iconography and religious painting of the Renaissance. The Byzantine icon is lean and fasting; it is a statement of faith and of a certain ethos that expresses what is rich in poverty, humility, contrition, with a disposition to the quest for sanctity.[14]

The basic idea here is that icons are lean and fasting because they depict saints as emaciated ("crucified") figures and in so doing convey their spiritual character. Renaissance paintings are presumably less spiritual because they show holy persons as full-bodied and robust. This view rests on the mistaken notion that a certain physical attribute translates automatically into a spiritual one. But leanness does not constitute in and of itself (even in a figure rendered with a high degree of abstraction) a *saint's* or *ascetic's* leanness. In order to fit this description, it has to be painted *as such* and be visibly distinct from other

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pp. 45–46, 84. *The "Painter's Manual" of Dionysius of Fourna*, trans. Paul Hetherington (Torrance, 1989). For the role of *ekphraseis* in Cappadocian piety see, Vasiliki M. Limberis, *Architects of Piety, The Cappadocian Fathers and the Cult of the Martyrs* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 53–96.

12 Daniel Sahas, *Icon and Logos: Sources in Eighth-Century Iconoclasm* (Toronto, 1986), p. 15.

13 Belting, p. 3.

14 Ibid., pp. 15–16.

types of leanness in which ascetic aspects are not involved. Furthermore, if an icon is to be described as fasting, asceticism or saintliness should affect the entire composition. If plants, trees, rocks etc. are included, they too must conform to this condition. In addition, these qualities should be rendered in their Christian modality. Fasting should conform to a Christian ontology rather than a Buddhist or Hindu one.

The question, in other words, is not one of content but of modality. If all icons are ascetical in the sense suggested by Sahas, robust portraits of Christ, of the apostles, martyrs etc. should be excluded. In the exemplary sixth-century icon of *Christ Pantocrator* at St. Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, virility and robustness acquire intense spiritual qualities (as we shall see below), even though they are not ostensibly ascetical ("lean").[15] The fact that in most instances it is difficult to convey ascetical qualities in a robust figure should not lead us to conclude that any emaciated figure is necessarily ascetic or any robust figure necessarily unspiritual. There is also the distinction between intention and reality. Icons may be intended as "statements of faith," but that does not mean that they actually are. Furthermore, they are not the only images that are taken to function in this modality. For the icon to stand out in its class, it must consistently show Christian truths or realities better than other images do. The theological treatment of the work of art in both East and West makes these mistakes on a regular basis.

Although a comprehensive examination of the reasons for which Christian art and its theology took this direction is well beyond the scope of this study, there are three reasons that are particularly relevant to the argument I will be making. The first has to do with the ideological (to the extent that they were politically motivated) and doctrinal priorities of the imperial and ecclesiastical institutions that shaped the role of Christian art in liturgy and devotion. The second concerns certain logical fallacies prevalent in theological treatises about art. The third reason has to do with an idea that theology shares with contemporary art theory namely, that the art object cannot dictate its own meaning or engage in acts of autonomous signification.

In approaching the exemplary Christian image as an object that can deliver its own meaning, I am adopting a view that benefits from the evolution of post-Hegelian thought. It centers on the critique of categories like reason, truth, beauty through which cultural ideals are exercised that inevitably structure and confine the art object within their own hermeneutic parameters.[16] But rather than deconstruct the Christian image and reconstitute it rhetorically in order to reveal and release these structures, this study attempts to rediscover it as an aesthetic being that carries and delivers its meaning in its own act of existence, a being

[15] Manolis Chatzidakis, "An Encaustic Icon of Christ at Sinai," trans. Gerry Walters, *Art Bulletin*, 49/3 (1967): pp. 197–208.

[16] Hegelian aesthetics subsumes art under the sphere of religion and defines the art object by its end (purpose) and therefore by its past, in "self-encirclement." On this point, see Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago, 1987), pp. 25–26.

presenting in its aesthetic form, analogically, the modality of a person. Since our aim is to find an integral place for theology in this form (rather than simply in the narrative content of the work), we try to identify images that operate theologically in a self-determining, hypostatic manner, as *sui generis* beings.

This requires studying the Byzantine icon for its inherent qualities rather than for qualities that it might acquire by operating in liturgical, devotional or ideological contexts. Granted that signification remains open to such variables, and extra-imaginal elements may enter the image and define it in private or public perception at any time, it is still important to keep this distinction active. This applies especially to the use of critical categories, since it often leads to generalizations that obscure rather than elucidate the aesthetic object at hand.

A case in point is P.A. Michelis' significant study of Byzantine aesthetics. Written nearly half a century ago, it is based on the Kantian concepts of beauty and sublimity and has an essentially Hegelian orientation. It argues for a Byzantine synthesis of classical and oriental elements. According to Michelis, Eastern Christianity fused rational order and rhythm with a transcendent and absolute divinity. The result was a sublime image that was contemplative and rational. In the West, by contrast, the sublime acquired a more sentimental and ecstatic quality.[17] The icon became two-dimensional (and even ugly) in order to convey intense psychological realities, to enable, as he put it, our "dynamic living of the Sublime."[18] The absence of plastic, three-dimensional qualities de-materialized physical beings, exaggerated their communicative features (e.g., large, staring eyes, still, rigid posture) and brought them to a state of commanding transcendence.[19]

Michelis situates Byzantine art in the logical spectrum of two important philosophical categories by imposing on it a plastic and expressive uniformity that it clearly does not have. Associating transcendence with the sublime, he tries to identify in Byzantine art an apophatic view of existence that schematizes visual form, exaggerates its expressive elements, and depletes the aesthetic object in order to elevate it to a higher spiritual domain. Like many who approach the Byzantine icon from an art-historical perspective today, Michelis has little interest in relating it to Orthodox theology. The form of apophaticism that is consistent with the Orthodox view of being and existence, as we shall see, is very different from what he assumes. Rather than deplete the image, it brings it to a state of repletion. Discarnation results in a movement of self-expression and actualization. An image of this type is open to a Modernist aesthetic, as we shall see.

The present study takes a careful look at the Modernist view of the Byzantine icon and later compares exemplary icons with Modernist works.

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17 P.A. Michelis, *Aesthetike Theorese tes Byzantines Technes* (Athens, 2001), pp. 262–268. P.A. Michelis, *An Aesthetic Approach to Byzantine Art*, trans. Stephen Xydis and Mary Moschona (London, 1955). All citations are from the Greek text.

18 Ibid., p. 159.

19 Ibid., pp. 151–152.

Russian avant-gardes appreciated certain aspects of the classical icon but misunderstood others mainly because they approached icons through a conceptual and at times ideological lens. They admired, among other things, the expressive quality of its color and elegance of its composition. But like Michelis, they emphasized its "Oriental" character and set out to prove it. On the other hand, folk icons or *lubki* were seen as primitive art and prominent artists extolled their aesthetic and anthropological significance.[20] It was a Romantic view of art and nation where the icon served to prove Russia's cultural and spiritual distinctiveness. Thus, the spiritualist iconology of Pavel Florensky (1882–1937) assigned to icons a mystical life similar to that of Platonic ideas. Intellective realities, they would come alive in the liturgy. Liturgy was performance:

> In this church lighting we can make out the faces of the saints, their countenances, i.e., heavenly aspects, living phenomena of another world, proto-phenomena, *Urphänomena* we would call them following Goethe's example. In a church we stand face to face with the platonic world of ideas, whereas in a museum we see not icons but merely caricatures of them.[21]

Florensky is a precursor of contemporary interest in the icon's performative powers and specular identities or emanations. This type of study borrows from semiotics and post-structuralist analysis to interpret and where necessary to deconstruct the icon in order to expose the social and ideological construction of its sanctity and power. Writing in this context, Gilbert Dagron has drawn attention to the cultic and imaginary function of icons and their use as authentication devices for establishing canonical portraiture and representation in Byzantium.[22] Vissera Pentcheva has defined the icon as a semiotic field that is dramatically constituted in liturgy to deliver intense synesthetic experiences, while Marie-José Mondzain has exposed patterns of state and ecclesiastical power and ideology hidden in its hieratic identity.[23]

Most of these seminal works rely on Iconophile polemics to establish the theological and, given the context, ideological character of the icon.[24] This has created an impressive body of literature which, however, overlooks the aesthetic implications of Orthodox theology before and after Iconoclasm and

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20 Andrew Spira, *The Avant-Garde Icon: Russian Avant-Garde Art and the Icon Painting Tradition* (Hampshire, 2008).

21 Nicoletta Misler (ed.), *Pavel Florensky, Beyond Vision: Essays on the Perception of Art*, trans. Wendy Salmond (London, 2002), p. 108.

22 See Gilbert Dagron, *Décrire et peindre: Essai sur le portrait iconique* (Paris, 2007), pp. 31–63, 65–82. Dagron, "Holy Images and Likeness."

23 Bissera V. Pentcheva, "The Performative Icon," *The Art Bulletin* 88/4 (Dec. 2006): pp. 631–655; *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium* (University Park, 2010), pp. 9, 14. Marie-José Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary*, trans. Rico Frances (Stanford, 2005).

24 Jaroslav Pelikan, *Imago Dei: The Byzantine Apologia for Icons* (Princeton, 1990), pp. 3–4, 67–98. Charles Barber, *Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Princeton, 2002), pp. 125–139, 80. Pentcheva, *Sensual*, pp. 62–88.

particularly its theotic ontology and vision of God.[25] The critical writings of St. Maximus the Confessor (c. 580–662), St. Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022) and St. Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) are either not considered at all or where they are, as in Charles Barber's *Contesting the Logic of Painting: Art and Understanding in Eleventh Century Byzantium* (2007), their discussion lacks a substantive theological context and therefore the appropriate hermeneutic categories in which to calibrate iconological questions. Thus Barber's elegant study of St. Symeon's visuality rewards us with an eclectic reading of intriguing texts but pays little attention to the fundamentals of the Greek Patristic tradition that inform Symeon's view of theophany and *theosis*, and to the integral nature of Orthodox ascetic experience and language in which his poetry is embedded.[26] Similarly, Pentcheva (2010) defines Orthodox theological and liturgical terms (e.g., *pneuma*, *epiklesis*, *achoretos*, *aprositos*) to taste to outline a cultic world for the icon that is imaginative and poetic in its desire to bring the icon to life, but seriously distorts the very theology on which it relies to advance its argument.[27]

This kind of distraction is not unavoidable. Granted that we bring to a theological, philosophical or iconographic corpus our contemporary questions and problematics, and in that sense impose a dialogue, a revivification, it is important, if that hermeneutic is to genuinely engage text and image, to consider not only its surface morphology—which readily yields to interpretation—but also the deeper strands that sustain and ground it. Here continuities with the past are essential especially where the text or the image belongs dynamically in them (i.e., in tradition), and projects its idiosyncratic elements from that vantage point (see our discussion of tradition in Chapter 3). Also important, in the case of terms that are conceptually saturated—as Greek theological and aesthetic terms and the texts they constitute are—is to identify these dense points and follow the paths they outline. This is by no means an easy task as it leads more often to ambiguity than it does to certainty, and therefore to the temptation to impose a hermeneutic rather than discover it as an indigenous form inside the text or work. Recalling Heidegger, we can consider the truth that the hermeneut seeks to be at work *in* the work: to be, as he says, in its "work-being" and thus to stand there as a voice that one heeds rather than a cipher into which one projects her own voice or idiom.[28]

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[25] On this basis Dagron defines the Byzantine icon systemically as a negative object, and interprets its ontology to be fundamentally one of absence rather than presence. Dagron, *Décrire*.

[26] Charles Barber, *Contesting the Logic of Painting: Art and Understanding in Eleventh-Century Byzantium* (Leiden, 2007), pp. 23–59.

[27] E.g., the Eucharist "as a saturated sensual experience ensured the interpenetration of human and divine"; "through the Incarnation the carnal *logos* became the instrument of God's plan for the salvation of humankind"; or defining "*kenosis*" as the "decanting of the divine into the world." Pentcheva, *Sensual*, pp. 42–43, 53, 87, 23.

[28] Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hoftsadter (New York, 1971), p. 60.

On the other hand, as is often the case with texts or images that exist vitally within a tradition, more than one voice is heard in what they say or show. St. Theodore the Studite (759–826), for example, uses the concept of *hypostasis* to explain how an image depicts Christ—in his act of being human.[29] This is a difficult concept and its application to art in this context challenging. Rather than take this term to mean union, as its theology suggests, the Studite stumbles on the idea that art cannot convey spiritual realities: "although he [a man] consists of body and soul, he does not show the property of the soul in the appearance of his form: how could he, since the soul is invisible?"[30] A painting is like a shadow, he argues; if Christ has a body and that body has a shadow, it is right for painting to replicate that relationship and paint his likeness.[31] The Platonic nature of this conception is evident. So is the problem it entails. Christ's *hypostasis* (*prosopon*) unites his two natures and thus any image of him must show him as existing in these two natures fully, rather than as a merely physical, finite being. It is therefore not enough to capture his human existence. An icon must also convey his divinity. This is the aesthetic challenge of the Iconoclastic argument that the Iconophile response did not meet.

The reason lies with a view of images shared by both sides. Its roots may be traced in Platonism, desert asceticism and the influence of Origenism and Monophysitism on Byzantine views of matter.[32] In Plato, painted images rouse the soul's mundane passions and prevent its contact with the divine. The solution is the ordination of art to supernal, intellective realities. All art is dissemblance and as such heteronomous. That which it represents is not fully present in it. In asceticism, discarnating the mental image or eliminating it altogether protects the soul from the assault of its own passions and the ploys of demons. Intellectualists like Origen (185–254) and Evagrius denigrated matter and sensuous form.[33] This view of matter and of the image appears in the Orthodox tradition but like a thread. Some theologies reflect it more than others. But after Maximus, its traces are harder to detect. In Maximus, Orthodox theology realizes its ontological potential. In Maximian ontology the lives of beings become iconic not in the specular manner of the Platonic reflection or the Plotinean emanation but in an overflow of graceful existence in which their natures are revealed.

Thus to discuss the Orthodox icon without taking into account Orthodox ontology is to subject it to an aesthetic poverty that it does not deserve.

[29] St. Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons*, trans. Catherine Ross (Crestwood, 2001), pp. 102–107; III, C, 5, 8, 11–12. On the influence of Platonism through Origen on Christian iconoclasm see, John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York, 1974), pp. 43–44.

[30] St. Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons*, pp. 90–91; III A, 34.

[31] Ibid., p. 109; III D, 2.

[32] Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, p. 44.

[33] John Meyendorff, *The Byzantine Legacy of the Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, 1982), pp. 168–170. John Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, trans. Adele Fiske (Crestwood, 1998), pp. 20–21.

Similarly, to incorporate the icon in contemporary constructions of the image as tokens of an ideological or phenomenological imaginary, or to draft it into a semiotics of performance and sacred theatre, is to engage a theoretical and cultural artifact rather than the actual image whose reality we seek. For some scholars, this is a way of compensating for its formalist treatment by art historians and museums, an understandable impulse but not in my view a right one.[34] Aside from subjecting the theological and spiritual foundations of religious iconography to a hermeneutic of suspicion, it shows a lack of appreciation for aesthetic expression—as if the only way to bring an image to life is to put it in some kind of action or drama external to it or to demonstrate its efficacy in psychic and social experience.

Aestheticism is a way of putting an aesthetic face on this practice. A phenomenology of ritual and synesthesia in liturgical experience certainly turns icons into vivid objects. But the price is superficiality. Orthodox liturgy is reduced to a religious drama and the icon to a visual actor. We can worry about the same effect when the image becomes a façade, a projection point of inexhaustible apparitions, a hyper-aesthetic pyrotechnic of "looks," as Jean-Luc Merion imagines it.[35] These are intriguing ventures into aesthetic experience but they incorporate the image in a universe of affective and intellective acts which ultimately direct us to the subject that negotiates them rather than to the image itself. By contrast, the approach taken in this study emphasizes the expressive integrity of the art object rather than its synesthetic and phenomenal dispersion, the theomorphic distinctiveness of its form rather than its anthropological and cultural determination, and its spiritual subsistence rather than its performative and specular force.

In those aspects of Byzantine art, church architecture and history that are relevant to this study, I rely on the work of Cervase Mathew, Hans Belting, Manolis Chatzidakis, André Grabar, Ernst Kitzinger, Liz James and Iakovos Potamianos, among others. Thorough description of an image with respect to its plastic qualities and composition helps establish its significational autonomy where present. Once the aesthetic object is defined in such terms, non-aesthetic parameters affecting signification will be easier to identify and set apart.[36] Chatzidakis' discussion of the icon of the Sinai *Pantocrator* is a good example:

> The treatment of the face, which retains primary interest, is extremely careful. Photographs clearly show how by reiterated strokes of fine brushes, the waxen colors oppose or superimpose themselves in areas of transparency or opacity, creating thereby the impression of a precious material and a surface palpitating

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34 Sharon E.J. Gerstel, "Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557) by Helen C. Evans" (Review), *The Art Bulletin*, 87/2 (Jun., 2005): pp. 331–341, 340.

35 Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berrand (New York, 2002), p. 72.

36 On color and its terminology in Byzantium, see below and in Liz James, *Light and Colour in Byzantine Art* (Oxford, 1996). On architecture, see Iakovos Potamianos, *To Phos ste Byzantine Ekklesia* (Light in the Byzantine Church) (Thessaloniki, 2000).

> with life. In certain places, the movement of the brush corresponds to that of the form represented. For example, a circular movement is noticeable in the region around the eyes. Moreover, the nuances in the rendering of shadows, the subtle play of warm and cool tones, and the delicate treatment of the lips and beard indicate a genuine sensitively toward coloristic effects of light, a sensitivity which appears original and not due to the traditional practice of an atelier, even one of high quality.[37]

There were Byzantine scholars, literati and craftsmen who actually looked at icons and mosaics with the same degree of detail. They showed both a technical and aesthetic deference to the art object and recognized its distinct character and individuality.

Four developments in European thought are also implicit in our approach. The first is the advent of historicism and the increasing significance of comparative studies in art history and theory, including the study of syncretism in Christian iconography. The second is the emergence, since Kant, of disinterested attention as one of the definitive qualities of the aesthetic and the peculiar autonomy accorded to the aesthetic object in the formative moments of this experience. The third is the legacy of Hegel's thesis that the aesthetic integrity of the art object is conceptually and historically mediated and under certain conditions subject to dissolution. And the fourth is Heidegger's idea that the radical depletion of being in Western modernity can be reversed by art's onto-poetic potency—a potency, though, that it owes to Being and not to itself. It gave rise to attempts to re-center the aesthetic in the realm of ontology rather than consciousness. An example is Hans-Georg Gadamer's definition of the artistic picture as an "ontological event" capable of fulfilling the self-expressive potential of its original—a notion indebted to Neoplatonism and to Aristotle's view of *mimesis* as a subsistence enhancing activity.[38]

Maximian theology allows us to draw aesthetic principles that are consistent with these ideas and can apply to the icon as a spiritual being. His deification (*theosis*) ontology suggests the radical realignment of perception and object in asceticism, under the concept of reverence (*eusebeia*). Reverence is essential to the perception of *enargeia* in the art object. There are significant parallels of this concept in Chinese aesthetics. But rather than juxtapose consciousness and being, *eusebeia* suggests their mutual transformation. Objects or persons that exist in this state have an evident exceptionality.

Thus, the saint and the living icon, the exemplary person and the exemplary image, exist outside institutional structures and restrictions. And yet, they embody the ideals that define them. Imperial and ecclesiastical rhetoric may interfere with their existence and lay claim to their identity. But in most instances these exemplary beings retain their autonomy. This distinction is

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[37] Chatzidakis, "An Encaustic Icon of Christ at Sinai."

[38] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York, 1975), pp. 119–127. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1448b. Aristotle, *Physics*, II. viii. 199a 15–20.

overlooked by contemporary scholarship that takes the rhetoric too seriously and in the process misses the art.[39] It ignores what an image is actually saying in favor of what it was made to say or what it allegedly said. Theology in these studies is seen as an intellectual (specifically ideological) enterprise and an accomplice of power. Certainly Orthodox Christianity, like all religions, has its share of both. But it also has another, far more significant dimension that accounts for its spiritual life.

Orthodox theology emphasizes the empirical, radical knowledge of God given in prayer. Theology is a way of life not an intellectual pursuit. Maximian theology (and all Orthodox theology) can only be understood in that context. It is rooted in the experience of the Desert Fathers, starting with the fourth century ascetics St. Macarius of Egypt and his disciple Evagrius Ponticos (d. 399). The latter's saying "… and if you pray truly, you are a theologian" is a terse summation of Orthodox life and theology, embraced by the Cappadocian Fathers and all Orthodox theologians since.[40] In the same spirit, St. Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) distinguished between the intellectual nature and essentialism of apophatic theology—which can only posit difference from God and "cannot, by itself, procure union with transcendental things"—and the real and personal knowledge of a living God in deification (*theosis*).[41] God is active in his energies but unknown in his essence. For Palamas, as for Evagrius and Macarius, intimate knowledge of God is possible in this life and involves the entire person, body and soul: "[apophatic] theology is as far from the vision of God in light, and as distinct from intimate conversation with God, as knowledge is different from possession."[42] The ascetic who converses with God inhabits God or participates in divine being. The exemplary image has a similar, intimate relationship to its object: it participates in its being and makes it present aesthetically.

This study pays special attention to the aesthetic ideas of Modernist artists. Some serve to remind us that the integrity of the art object is not only a concern for the Christian theologian. For these artists, theory is an epiphenomenon of art rather than an inimical part of its being. Painting that overlooks this distinction, ceases to be painting. In 1964 Picasso objected to the theorization of painting in these terms:

> Enough of Art. It's Art that kills us. People no longer want to do painting: they make Art. People want Art. And they are given it. But the less Art there is in painting the more painting there is … Something holy, that's it … You ought to be able to say that painting is as it is, with its capacity to move us, because it is as

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39 Mondzain.

40 Andrew Louth, "'And If You Pray Truly, You Are a Theologian': Some Reflections on Early Christian Spirituality," in Jill Rait (ed.), *1997 Paine Lectures in Religion, Wisdom of the Byzantine Church: Evagrius of Pontos and Maximus the Confessor* (Columbia, 1997), pp. 1–11, 1, 8.

41 John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, trans. George Lawrence (Wing Road, 1964), p. 206 (*Tr*. I 3:21).

42 Ibid., p. 207 (*Tr*. I 3:42). Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, p. 20.

though it were touched by God … You can go to the moon or walk under the sea, or anything else you like, but painting remains painting because it eludes such investigation. It remains there like a question. And it alone gives the answer.[43]

This is a truth that a Christian aesthetics must take into account. Catholic theologians and philosophers (e.g., Karol Wotjyla and Jacques Maritain) have argued that the only valid ontology for art is a Christian ontology.[44] Orthodox theologians (e.g., Vladimir Lossky) attribute the presence of exemplary icons throughout history to God's mystical sanctification of beings in tradition.[45] The argument of this study is modest by comparison. On the one hand, attention to the aesthetic qualities of icons can correct theology that treats aesthetic judgments as a species of theological judgment. On the other, an existential theology can correct Christian art that lapses into conceptualism and forgets the ontological distinctiveness that its objects can achieve.

This brings us to the concept of beauty. In the West, beauty is still the principal critical category of theological aesthetics. There are historical and theological reasons for its prevalence. In my view, the concept is overrated. The ability of an image to realize transcendent realities aesthetically does not lie with its beauty. It is *enargeia* that brings the image to a state of ontological plenitude and presence, and enables it to convey holiness or in the case of Christ divinity. Defined in the standard Scholastic terms of *integritas*, *proportio* or *consonantia*, and *claritas*, beauty helps explain how an image or any other composition can be coherent or achieve its integral form and intelligibility. But beauty is static and placid whereas *enargeia* is hypostatic and dynamic. A Christian image without *enargeia* either reifies or conceptualizes being. The tension between the concept of being and a thing's act of existence is recognized by both Roman Catholic and Orthodox theologians but resolved differently.[46] The predominance of beauty in Catholic aesthetics reflects this difference, as we shall see below.

In our study we draw critically from the Orthodox tradition. There are four reasons for taking this direction. Iconoclasm and the Iconophile theology that opposed it have their roots in the Christian East. Their deeper roots (and inherent ambiguities) lie with Greek philosophy (Platonism), the visual character of Greek religion, the valorization of art in Greek experience since the time of Homer, and the aesthetic sophistication that Byzantium inherited

43 Dore Ashton (ed.), *Picasso on Art: A Selection of Views* (New York, 1972), pp. 24–25.

44 Karol Wotjyla (Pope John Paul II), "Letter to Artists," *Inside the Vatican*, May 1999. See also below Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism and the Frontiers of Poetry*, trans. Joseph W. Evans (New York, 1962).

45 Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood, 1974), pp. 141–168.

46 For a similar argument in St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) see Étienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. L.K. Shook (Notre Dame, 1956), pp. 34, 44. See also Günther Pöltner, "The Beautiful after Thomas Aquinas: Questioning Present-day Concepts," trans. David Flood, in Oleg V. Bychkov and James Fodor (eds.), *Theological Aesthetics after von Balthasar* (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 51–57. For the notion of "full participation in Divinity" in Aquinas, see St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, Vol. IV*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Allen, 1948), III 1.2.

and assimilated from its Hellenic past.[47] Second, Orthodox iconography, particularly its monastic practice, is extensively influenced by ascetical precepts which emphasize the existential, lived, reorientation of the senses and intellect in pursuit of deification, and the personal and restorative union with God's energies in the natural life. The prevalence of aphorism in ascetic manuals and collections of spiritual counsels, the deliberate exercise of brevity, silence, attentiveness and stillness in all activities of life, interior and exterior, carry an aesthetic dimension that is absent from the more intellectually oriented asceticism associated with the Catholic tradition.[48]

Furthermore, the monastic character of Orthodox liturgy has distilled these qualities in the public mind, diffused them in the culture and given them a fecund subtlety that in Romantic terms we might call a sensibility. Orthodox theology, as we shall see below and more extensively in Chapter 3, prefers to go deeper and see this diffusion and its creative forms through the prism of tradition.[49] In essence, it is the ascetic character of Orthodoxy, wedded to its restorative vision of *theosis* in which creation and humanity are both redeemed and perfected in this life, that make it the ground of an aesthetic investigation in the nature of the Christian image. *Enargeia* captures this movement—which is at once *kenotic* and *plerotic*—in the art object.

Third, the Orthodox view of the vision of God as uncreated light has no exact equivalent in Western theology despite numerous attempts recently to show that *theosis* is a doctrine shared by Roman Catholic (principally Aquinas) and Protestant (e.g., Luther) theology.[50] In its Christian form, *theosis* dates to the early centuries of desert asceticism which emphasized purifying prayer and the illuminative, irradiating presence of grace in the human heart.[51] We find the themes of divinization and participation in the divine in St. Irenaus (c. 115–c. 202), St. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–c. 215), St. Athanasius (c. 296–d. 373), St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) and St. Gregory Nazianzen (382–390) whose treatment of the concept, unlike that of St. Gregory of Nyssa (335–399), echoes Platonic and Neoplatonic ideas and an Origenist view of the cosmic redemption.[52] St. Maximus the Confessor (580–662) is a key figure in the concept's systematic development

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47 Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, pp. 42–44.

48 As seen, for example, in the spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, trans. George E. Ganss, S.J. (Chicago, 1992). See also Alphonsus Rodriguez, *Practice of Perfection and Christian Virtues*, trans. Joseph Rickaby (Chicago, 1929).

49 Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, pp. 115–125.

50 Gosta Hallonsten, "*Theosis* in Recent Research: A Renewal of Interest and a Need for Clarity," in Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung (eds.), *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Madison, 2007), pp. 281–293.

51 For *theosis* in Greek and Roman religion and in Judaism, see Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 16–78.

52 Nazianzen coined the term *theosis*. See Russell, *Doctrine*, p. 341. J.A. McGuckin, "The Strategic Adaptation of Deification in the Cappadocians," in Christensen and Wittung, *Partakers*, pp. 101–110.

and his theology, as we shall see, can be properly characterized as *theotic* in that it is permeated by the vision of the restitution of human nature, a feat at once human and divine. The doctrine was rekindled in the poetry and theology of St. Symeon the New Theologian in the eleventh century, and given its definitive formulation by Palamas in the context of the Hesychastic controversy some three hundred years later.

Perhaps the most significant Palamite concept for the study of the Christian image and the point where, as A.N. Williams has shown, we can see a clear difference from Aquinas, is Palamas' claim that the uncreated light is visible not only spiritually but also sensibly.[53] It presupposes that the senses have first been sanctified and regenerated by divine grace as happened to the disciples in Christ's Transfiguration, the event which centered *theosis* in Christ and human experience. Thus *theosis* is not confined to the intellect and the will, as in Aquinas and in contemporary Catholic interpretations (e.g., Karl Rahner) of the concept, but includes the transfigured senses which can now see the world from the vantage point of humanity and divinity.[54]

This means that in Orthodox terms, we can speak of a deified form in art in the same way that we speak of the deified appearance of an ascetic. From an aesthetic point of view, *theosis* invites the reconsideration of abstraction and the role of light and color in painting, issues that were at the core of Modernist art. It thus makes it possible to identify critical similarities between certain Modernist paintings and icons. It also opens the Christian image aesthetically, without compromising its integrity and distinctiveness, to comparisons with an iconography that embraces a transcendental view of experience, that of Zen painting. Thus, in bringing Modernist and Buddhist art closer to the exemplary art of Christianity, and doing so on a solid theological and aesthetic premise, the present study views the relationship between sacred and secular art, Christian and non-Christian iconographies as constructive and dialogical rather than defensive and adversarial.

The fourth reason concerns the Orthodox understanding of "tradition" which emphasizes the ongoing creative synergy of divine and human activity in ecclesial life. In Catholicism, particularly in art and liturgy after Vatican II, the term has acquired strong historicist and anthropological connotations. In Orthodoxy, by contrast, despite some critical voices, the prevailing view of tradition equates it with the animating energy and presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church (see Chapter 7). This presence is manifested as joy, vivacity and illumination and brings participants to a condition of ontological plenitude or perfection.

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[53] A.N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (New York, 1999), pp. 114–118, 172–174.

[54] Francis J. Caponi, OSA, "Karl Rahner: Divinization in Roman Catholicism," in Christensen and Wittung, *Partakers*, pp. 259–280.

Concentrated diachronically and synchronically in the Church, in its mysteries and liturgical life, it expands from there into all aspects of human existence but reaches its highest forms in those human activities that are permeated by the *logos* of divine life. The human person is its mediating center and nature, its charismatic recipient.

Tradition may thus be likened to a flowing river in which different forms of life arise and to which they belong collectively while retaining their uniqueness and distinctive forms. Unlike traditionalism, it is a witness to its own emergence rather than a dictating, regulating matrix for expression—hence its inherent freedom.[55] Immersed in this river of grace, the artist is not asserting a self-originating, self-centered vision. Rather, he emerges as the unique carrier of a dynamic trajectory of charismatic energy and vitality that actualizes yet unformed possibilities inherent in the art, ideas, literature and music of a past that opens its full life to the present. Here historicism becomes irrelevant because the now and the forever, the *nun* and *aei*, converge. When art is approached in this manner, artist and work transcend the extra-artistic influences associated with religious, social and cultural institutions and their underlying ideologies. There is evidence, as we shall see in Chapters 2 and 15, of a similar understanding and practice of tradition in China and Japan. The apprentice in Japanese traditional arts who eventually takes his teacher's name (e.g., in the Kanō and Tosa schools of painting), as would a son, assumes a similar relationship to the works associated with his name.

Three final points need to be addressed. Interdisciplinary studies work at the intersection rather than at the core of disciplines. As a result, critical issues within the disciplines cannot be addressed in depth and a certain degree of ambiguity is therefore inevitable. In taking an Orthodox approach to the Christian image based on deification and theophany and in making claims for Orthodox distinctiveness on that basis, we are aware that this distinctiveness has been and continues to be the subject of debate and discussion.[56] This debate is beyond the scope of this study except in one practical sense. As Andrew Louth has observed, the discussion of *theosis* is typically cast in terms that reflect established theological patterns of thought, Catholic and Protestant, which Orthodoxy is invited to enter and engage in order to make the case of its difference.[57] What we seek in this study is to bring to this engagement an Orthodox aesthetic vocabulary

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[55] For a discussion of traditionalism in Greek iconography, see Nikolaos Loudovikos, *Orthodoxia kai Eksychronismos* (Orthodoxy and Modernization) (Thessaloniki, 2006), pp. 347–355.

[56] For a Catholic perspective see Jeffrey D. Finch, "Neo-Palamism, Divinizing Grace, and the Breach between East and West," in Christensen and Wittung, *Partakers*, pp. 233–249; for a comprehensive bibliography, Jeffery A. Wittung, "Resources on *Theosis* with Select Primary Sources in Translation," in Christensen and Wittung, *Partakers*, pp. 294–309.

[57] Andrew Louth, "The Place of *Theosis* in Orthodox Theology," in Christensen and Wittung, *Partakers*, pp. 32–44, 32–33.

and speak in its terms. This turn inwards is not meant to lock Orthodox discourse into a polemical or defensive stance analogous to that which occasionally informed the school of Fotis Kontoglou (1895–1965) that revived Byzantine iconography in reaction to the influence of Catholic art on nineteenth-century Greece (see Chapter 5). On the contrary, it is intended from the start as a dialogical opening in the full sense of the word where one is committed to speak from the *logos* of a subject and toward its yet unrevealed realities.

There is one more thing to emphasize in this context. As Fr. Louth has wisely pointed out, *theosis* is not "an isolated *theologoumenon*" but the very heart of Orthodox life and practice, the frequency, we might add, in which Orthodoxy can be experienced and known.[58] Thus, it would be a mistake to confine dialogue between Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant theologians on this subject to doctrinal differences or to elaborate conceptual distinctions as if the subject was theory rather than life. A more integral approach that takes into account the liturgy and the arts, the ascetical practices and spirituality and the historical conditions in which these have been experienced, will lead to a deeper and more constructive appreciation of differences and common ground.

This brings me to the second point. The present study devotes a number of chapters to a critical examination of Catholic and Orthodox theologies and philosophies of art before turning its attention to Byzantine iconography, Modernist painting and Zen art. The absence of a discussion of Catholic iconography in this context is a tactical decision. In showing that the Christian image has been misconstrued by both sides, our objective is to clear the ground for a new approach which we believe should be founded on the theology of *theosis*. Our concentration on the Orthodox side leaves the prospect of a Catholic aesthetics in the same key open.

Finally, our turn to Zen painting and Ch'an art theory is the result of two considerations. The first has to do with their emphasis on lively form in the art object and an aesthetics that is consistent with what *enargeia* suggests in the Greek and Byzantine traditions and in the interpretation of the concept that is presented in this study. The second relates to the emphasis on transcendence and transformation in form that we find in Zen and Ch'an painting and their explicit association with enlightenment. The combination of these qualities constitutes a vantage point from where we can observe the Christian image outside its customary parameters and in what we hope to be a new light.

From this perspective, what has been called a crisis in Christian art is also a time of great opportunities. In recent years, the Byzantine icon has met with wide acceptance in Catholic religious circles, especially among contemplatives, assuming, at least symbolically, the role of Christianity's premier spiritual image. This, in my opinion, is not accidental, but neither

58 Ibid., p. 43.

is it proof, as some Orthodox theologians hasten to conclude, of its *de facto* spiritual and aesthetic supremacy. Rather, it indicates a shift within the broader domain of Christian iconography, toward a rethinking of the Christian image and its relationship to its others.

The present study is a first step in this direction. It is divided in four parts. The first part presents the rationale for the study and its key concepts. The second part explains the formative role played by two logical fallacies in Modernist and contemporary theological approaches to the Byzantine icon and the Christian image. The third part shows the presence in Orthodox theology and Byzantine experience of an alternative view that recognizes the art object's *enargic* or plenary life and integrates it in the vision of God. The fourth part further defines this view in the context of Orthodox theophany and *theosis* by exploring affinities with Modernist and Zen art.

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The Exemplary Work of Art

Exemplarity is the first concept that needs definition. Since it is Christian exemplarity that concerns us here, our starting point is theological. At the core of exemplarity is the existential nature of Orthodox theology with its emphasis on participation in the divine life. Like the saint or holy person, the exemplary image stands out. The Orthodox theologian theologizes "existentially" striving to put to words what is revealed or disclosed to her "in the silence of faith, in silent vision."[1] In theology, as in poetry, the boundaries of language expand. Georges Florovsky described Patristic theology as "existentially rooted in the decisive commitment of faith." For the Orthodox, any dogmatic formulation that is not filled with the experience of God is empty—a mere "contour" of the truth that only a personal encounter with the living Christ can complete.[2]

This is not a new idea. St. Gregory Nazianzen said that theology has to be done "in the manner of the Apostles, not in that of Aristotle" (*alieutikos*, *ouk aristotelikos*) while St. John Climacus (c. 579–649) wrote that it is "the climax of purity that is the beginning of theology" (*telos de agneias hypothesis theologias*).[3] Since the time of the Cappadocian, Alexandrian and Syrian Fathers, the Eastern Church has emphasized the concrete and transforming experience of God in all aspects of human life. It is a "method" whose impact on thought and language has been profound.[4]

The ascetic theologian may speak apothegmatically in the terse, lucid and personal manner of the Desert Fathers (*logos gerondikos*) and of so many Athonite Elders today, who speak in order to change a life rather than prove the existence of God. Or, like Maximus and Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022), he may adopt a lateral, iconizing and paradoxical form of writing

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1 Georges Florovsky, *Creation and Redemption (Collected Works, Vol. 3)* (Belmont, 1976), vol. 3, pp. 30, 35.

2 Georges Florovksy, *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View (Collected Works, Vol. 1)* (Belmont, 1972), vol. 1, pp. 108–109, 113.

3 Ibid., 108.

4 Ioannes Romanides, *Paterike Theologia* (Patristic Theology) (Thessaloniki, 2004), pp. 49–51; *Dogmatike kai Symbolike Theologia tes Orthodoxou Katholikes Ekklesias* (Dogmatic and Symbolic Theology of the Orthodox Catholic Church) (2 vols, Thessaloniki, 2009), vol. 1, pp. 90–120.

that expresses the experience of illumination (*photismos*) and divine vision (*theophany*) in the received vocabulary of Orthodox theology and spirituality.[5] An exact and rigid architectonic of theological concepts, such as we find in Scholasticism in the West, is of little interest to the Orthodox theologian who experiences the fragility and limits of language while at the same time realizing its inherent plasticity and fecundity.

Orthodox ascetics consistently describe purification and deification as conditions that affect one's intellect and senses. A person in this state is enveloped in the uncreated *Logos*. This is not the state of total ineffability that characterizes ecstasy and rupture. The words used are those of human experience and of the finite and relative time in which it takes place. Thus one is humbled by doing theology (or for that matter philosophy). On the surface, this antinomy points to the word that operates apophatically as a sign or metaphor. But that is not the only way in which Orthodoxy opts to speak. When language becomes the locus of theophany, it is both annulled (silenced) and perfected. This poeticizing, creative dynamic is obvious in the alternation of restraint and fluidity, modesty and exuberance that informs the liturgy and hymnography of the Eastern Church.

The same dynamic informs iconography, as we can see in this reflection on the Orthodox icon:

> The light in particular no longer falls *on* the figure from outside, but streams out *from within it*, and surrounds it. This is the light or glory of the divine presence in which the saint stands and which he or she also carries within as indwelling grace—hence the icon as depiction at once of the eschatological transformation of soul and body, and of the mystical experience available in the present life.[6]

The author here applies this description indiscriminately to all icons, a view with which we take exception. Still, what is immediately obvious is that the role of light and tonality in an icon is not a simple, technical or merely expressive matter. It requires an aesthetic orientation that builds on paradox. The light within is also the light without. The image exists in the present (now), in the luminance of the holy person it puts forth. But it also exists in eternity (forever), in the luminance of uncreated light in which the angel, saint and martyr subsists—in the time that begins and ends (*chronos*, *nun)* and in the time that begins but has no end (*aion*, *aei*).

Thus, the shifting of aesthetic terms or the reconstruction of the aesthetic object along the lines of what Orthodox asceticism discerns as the mystical lives of all beings, are attempts to make invisible realities visible. The image becomes a mystical being. And it is mystical ontologically, in its own act

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[5] On the writing style of St. Symeon, see St. Symeon the New Theologian, *On the Mystical Life: The Ethical Discourses*, trans. and ed. Alexander Golytzin (3 vols, Crestwood, 1995), vol. 1, pp. 10–11.

[6] Alexander Golytzin, "Christian Mysticism Over Two Millennia," in Basil Lourié and Andrei Orlov (eds.), *The Theophaneia School: Jewish Roots of Eastern Christian Mysticism* (St. Petersburg, 2007), p. xxx.

of being itself, rather than intellectively (as symbol or sign), as concept or idea. The Orthodox theologian defines, analyzes and proposes in order to take language to an encounter with an actual, living object. Word meets life. Similarly, she reads, writes and prays in order to *see* God and partake of the divine life rather than for the sake of writing or praying alone.

Exemplarity describes the actualization in the aesthetic object, and within the limits of aesthetic form, of the physical and spiritual realities evident in beings that participate in divine life and exist in communion with God. Participation is through purification (*katharsis*), illumination (*photismos*) and deification (*theosis*). Orthodox ascetic theology is a way of life rather than the pursuit of knowledge *about* God. Spiritual life and ascesis are inseparable. But not all ascetics reach the same level of proximity or *parrhesia* with God. Similarly, spiritual realities appear consistently in Orthodox icons in a stylized form and exceptionally in the exemplary way that concerns us here.

This ties in to an idea that we introduced earlier. The presence, for instance, of meekness or humility in the physiognomy of the ascetic has an obvious theological significance. But it is not by itself sufficient to bring the icon to a state of exemplarity. Exemplarity requires that the image itself, qua image, participate in the humility of its subject and be present as an instance of humble existence. This movement toward self-expression and realization in the aesthetic object is best conveyed by *enargeia* (see next chapter). Thus, whereas exemplarity also refers to the overall standing of an image with regard to images of the same class (Christian), *enargeia* refers exclusively to that aesthetic quality which makes an image exemplary. In its Christian sense, exemplarity suggests the *kata charin* or according to grace subsistence of the art object. This kind of object is typically paradoxical. It is capable, for example, of silent (visual) speech. A certain kind of movement within an image brings what is present there to such an overflow of meaning that speech is seen rather than heard.

Thus the exemplary image exists in a state of eloquent subsistence. It does not represent meekness or simplicity: it embodies them and lives (articulates) them aesthetically. In this sense, the aesthetic object exists in a modality of sanctification. It is a being that theologizes or partakes in the divine life by its very act of being what it is. Deification in Maximus will be discussed in detail later, but the following passage is immediately relevant. *Logos* is the actualizing and perfecting principle of being which in the human person (most completely in the saint) culminates in a conscious and synergical relationship with God:

> In this way he becomes a 'portion of God,' insofar as he exists through the *logos* of his being which is in God and insofar as he is good through the *logos* of his well-being which is in God; and insofar as he is God through the *logos* of his eternal being which is in God, he prizes the *logoi* and acts according to them. Through them he places himself wholly in God alone, wholly imprinting and forming God alone in himself, so that by grace he himself 'is God and is called God.' By his gracious condescension God became man … By this blessed inversion, man is

made God by divinization and God is made man by hominization. For the Word of God and God wills always and in all things to accomplish the mystery of his embodiment.[7]

In Maximus, deification is the divinely informed perfection of one's being. The act itself is described as an interior movement, a realization from within of one's ontic fullness. Thus the mystery of the Incarnation is enacted perpetually in creation and in God. All things exist in Christ and realize Christ in their being. The human person participates by making *katharsis*, *photismos* and *theosis* a conscious and deliberate activity, a way of life.

In Aquinas, who is so important in the Western tradition, there is less emphasis on divine and human synergy and *theotic* transformation.[8] This is largely because his ontology, though relational, is more intellective than existential in scope. In Maximus, as is evident from the above passage, the human person incorporates God in the literal sense of breathing and living him—"wholly imprinting and forming God alone in himself." In Aquinas, God's own openness and bareness—in the Incarnation his humility or *kenosis*—is transcendentally present and active in all beings. But it does not penetrate and transform their being as it does in Maximus.[9] The Incarnation is reflected in the actuality of human existence but that actuality does not reach deep into the carnal and visceral recesses of the human person. Instead, it concentrates in the contemplative, intellective act.

… God is in all things by His power, inasmuch as all things are subject to His power; He is by His presence in all things, as all things are bare and open (*nuda et aperta*) to His eyes; He is in all things by His essence, insasmuch as He is present to all as the cause of their being … No other perfection, except grace, added to substance, renders God present in anything as the object known and loved (*cognitum et amatum*); therefore only grace constitutes a special mode of existence in things.[10]

In Aquinas, grace is the loving diffusion of divine causality in all beings through which efficacy is imparted to them in accordance with their nature and position in the cosmic order. Gilson explains:

The universe, as represented by St. Thomas, is not a mass of inert bodies passively moved by a force which passes through them, but a collection of active beings each enjoying the efficacy delegated to it by God along with actual being. At the first beginnings of a world like this, we have to place not so much a force being exercised as an infinite goodness being communicated. Love is the unfathomable

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[7] Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* PG 91, 1084BCD. See also Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*: *Selected Writings from St. Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken (Crestwood, 2003), p. 60.

[8] Loudovikos, *Orthodoxia*, pp. 86–93. See also Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (London, 2002), pp. 192–200 (as cited in Loudovikos).

[9] John Milbank and Cathy Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London, 2001), pp. 5–6.

[10] S T, I, q. 8, a. 3, ad 2. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiae of Saint Thomas Aquinas-Latin English Edition, Vol. 1, Prima Pars, Q. 1–64* (Scotts Valley, 2008).

source of all causality … Beneath each natural form there lies hidden a desire to imitate by means of action the creative fecundity and pure actuality of God.[11]

Thus, for Aquinas things reveal their sanctified being when seen intellectively in their pure act of existence. By contrast, for Maximus and Orthodox theology the intellective act is replaced in *theosis* with a comprehensive or total perception in which all the senses participate. For Maximus, the God who incarnates silently in the human person is the God of a purgative, re-humanizing asceticism—rather than an efficacious (Aristotelian) causality. In *theosis* the synergy of human freedom and divine grace reconstitute the human person as a being inside whom the mystery of the Incarnation becomes a living reality. The New Theologian wrote: "Blessed is he who has seen the light of the world take form within himself (*ean eauto morphothen*), for he, having Christ as an embryo within, shall be reckoned his mother …."[12] According to Lossky, *theosis* is a condition that affects the entire person, intellect (*nous*), body (*sarx*, *soma*) and senses (*aestheseis*).[13] Every part of Symeon's body bears the divine light (*photophora*) (see Chapters 12 and 13).[14]

By analogy, exemplarity characterizes the art object that makes manifest in its act of existence an interior life and eloquence. This is readily perceived as an aesthetic fact. Ideas are nowhere to be seen. The image does not "convey" or "display" concepts. It *lives* them. This is also the ascetic's form of life: one of transparent, self-evident (unassuming) holiness that is inseparable from her personality. Orthodox asceticism is centered in the human person. Its austerities are intended to realize the ascetic's unique qualities and integrate the full person in her own place and time in the divine life. This is a condition of total vibrancy and animation, a flourishing of personality of which holiness is both the expression and condition.

Thus, the ascetic is not an ecclesiastical type, a man or woman who fits a model or has been formed to that end (through an ascetical regiment or program). Likewise, the exemplary image is not a picture formed strictly speaking by a consecrated artist, a sacred institution or a canonical theology. It is freely and fully theological in its own being. There are more analogies that we can draw in this context. Just as sin brings the human person to a state of resignation, to an ontic lethargy, so can painting denigrate its subject to the position of a plastic artifact and itself to simulation. By contrast, in the exemplary image, physical (sensuous) elements that stand in the way of vivid form are removed. Their removal (abstraction) brings the aesthetic object to a state of hypostatic perfection by intensifying and augmenting its expressivity.

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11 Gilson, *Christian*, pp. 183–184.

12 Symeon the New Theologian, *Mystical*, vol. 1, p. 168. *Éthique X*, 885–860 in Syméon le nouveau théologien, *Traités théologiques et éthiques*, trans. and ed. Jean Darrouzès (Paris, 1967), p. 320.

13 On the distinction between *ecstasy* and *theosis* in this context, see Romanides, *Paterike*, pp. 76–77. See also Lossky, *Image*, pp. 68–69.

14 Alexander Golytzin, "The Body of Christ: Saint Symeon the New Theologian on Spiritual Life and the Hierarchical Church," in Lourié and Orlov, *Theophaneia*, pp. 108–109.

Thus in the same manner that the austerities of asceticism perfect one's humanity, abstraction (under certain conditions) helps bring perfection to the aesthetic object.

Even though exemplarity cannot be present in certain types of operationally holy or miraculous image, ontological parallels between the two types of icon and particularly the manner in which both relate to representation, are worth exploring. Perspiration or secretion of aromatic gum resins in icons (and sometimes in frescos) takes attention away from the visual object and affects its form. For the faithful, the path traced by myrrh or tears on the icon's surface and the aromatic substance itself are evidence of the efficacious presence of the figures portrayed and through them of the image itself existing as a theophanic reality. In Athonite processions, for example, miraculous icons, like the *Protaton* icon of the Virgin *Axion Esti*, are treated like living persons (rather than just paintings).[15] This is because they are believed to incarnate the holy image they bear. They give to a being that is otherwise invisible but always present, the conditions necessary for its temporal (but ever iconic) embodiment. It is the conscious presence of a holy being (its self-induced visibility) that activates an icon's physical substance and brings the aesthetic object to a state of somatic animation (e.g., weeping tears).

In the icon that "bleeds" or "weeps," the aesthetic object becomes corporealized (e.g., surface tears and secretions disrupt color and texture) and deified. In the case of the exemplary image, an evocative liveliness, an act of self-expression originates in the plastic object itself. Like flowing myrrh, this motioning form brings the image to life. Christ's painted holiness is a reality. It results from an ontological fruition in the art object similar to the one by which a panel of wood weeps myrrh or a dried jasmine bush fills with flowers. It can even be called miraculous (or on the verge of speech) because of the extraordinary way in which in such instances painting absorbs and realizes its subjects. Exemplarity is a form of aesthetic sanctification. It brings things to a state of holiness, as Christianity understands it.

An exemplary Christian image operates where representation ends and a certain kind of life begins. This is why it cannot be understood semiotically. To explain this point it is helpful to turn to the work of Roland Barthes on photography. Barthes draws a distinction between *studium*, the photograph as subject of convention and schematized time, and *punctum*, the photograph as evidence of the loss of things and persons to time.[16] For Barthes, the photograph is a witness to death because it confines its object within an unreachable and finite (specular) immortality. The nature or *eidos* of photography (the *punctum*) is sought in his own being rather than in that of the image whose nature he (so desperately) wants to probe—"I would have to

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15 Belting, pp. 48–50.

16 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, 1981), pp. 14–15, 27–28, 40–43. See also C. A. Tsakiridou, "Roland Barthes Explores Photography 'as a Wound'," *Paragraph: A Journal of Modern Critical Theory*, 18/3 (1995): pp. 273–285.

descend deeper into myself to find the evidence of Photography."[17] This move is significant because it establishes the image internally as a visceral reality, and externally as representation.

Barthes' is an autoscopic aesthetic: "this photograph collected all the possible predicates from which my mother's being was constituted …."[18] Of his mother in that picture he writes: "I discovered her *as into herself*."[19] But that is all he will yield to the image (which the reader never gets to see). The photograph's revelation is personal and incommunicable: "for you it would be nothing but an indifferent picture," he writes. As in the Kantian judgment of the aesthetic, it is irreducibly configured to his sensibility (and trapped there): "The photograph is really an emanation of the referent."[20] Emanation is an operation that does not take place inside the image but outside it, by means of a mechanism that is alien to its being. This split is essential to representation and it is precisely where subjectivity takes possession of the art object and appropriates it. The icon is often placed in a similar position, as we shall see.

To the extent that it retains a referent (i.e., it is assigned one and viewed from that standpoint), the photograph cannot really take possession of its subject. For Barthes this is not a problem. Photographs contain a dual motion: the fixation (in timelessness) of being (its reflection as in a mirror) and its reconstitution in the longing vision (the visceral apparatus) of the viewer. The camera dominates the image and dictates its ontology. The aesthetic is thus instrumentalized. A photograph is what a camera makes it to be: the trace of a thing caught in time. But there is another "camera" that belongs to its viewer who simulates photographic being. Embodying the mechanism of the camera and the image-mirage, the author too can undertake to construct his life of images.

Thus Barthes embodies photography as an extension of his failing memory and an arousal of his fading imagination in which things and persons lost are kept. Whatever the image of the mother may have shown, it is his to appropriate and seclude. And yet, as with Kant—where subjectivity ultimately yields to beauty's commanding actuality in the work of genius—this internalized image continues to resonate with the being of photography and assume a nearly religious life: "Photography has something to do with resurrection: might we not say of it what the Byzantines said of the image of Christ which impregnated St. Veronica's napkin: that it was not made by the hand of man, *acheiropoietos*?"[21]

The analogy is intriguing but superficially drawn. The motion of an *acheiropoietos* is not that of entrapped existence, but of a perpetual theophany (mediated by myrrh, or tears or speech). And Barthes' study of photography

17 Barthes, *Camera*, p. 60.

18 Ibid., p. 70.

19 Ibid., p. 71.

20 Ibid., pp. 73, 80. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J.H. Bernard (London, 1951), pp. 61, 125–127.

21 Barthes, *Camera*, p. 82. Kant, pp. 150–153 (§§46–47).

leaves no room for the aesthetic object. The photographic image is either coded collectively or subjected to a semiotics of private *anamnesis* (for otherwise the subject cannot dominate the image): "every photograph is a certificate of presence," but that presence is already an absence.[22] "From a phenomenological viewpoint," he writes, "in the Photograph, the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation."[23] But the being that is caught there has no life: "it is the living image of a dead thing."[24] Thus, photography cannot really bring things to life. The comparison to the icon, which is understood by Barthes as a cultic object—perhaps an analog to his cult of the deceased mother—is predictable and ill conceived: "the icons which are kissed in the Greek churches without being seen—on their shiny surface" are like photographs in that sense.[25]

As in contemporary art and art criticism, the image here suffers under the authoritative vision of its subject to the point of distortion and displacement. This is evident from the way that Barthes frames the question about photography's essence: "Certainly the image is not the reality but at least it is its perfect *analogon* and it is exactly this analogical perfection which, to common sense defines the photograph."[26] The "special status of the photographic image," he concludes, is that "*it is a message without a code* … a continuous message" (because no code disrupts it).[27] Whether it be an analog or a message, the photograph in this view has only a tenuous integrity, that of its function (mechanical, visceral, mnemonic). A subject will dominate it either as a user (the popular view of the photograph) or as a decodifier of its being (one among many). When decoded, the image is taken out of its own space and into the space of the operation itself. It becomes a rhetorical object. Its visuality is delegated to it from the outside—as if it had none to offer on its own.

By contrast, exemplarity as we understand it in this study, gathers and reconstitutes the image in its own space, and approaches it as an autarkic being (rather than a message or analog) that is capable of self-expression and self-realization. Exemplarity invites the viewer to relate to the art object in the reverent way that Maximus has called *eusebeia*. In *eusebeia*, as we shall see in detail later, senses and intellect forego their ordinary modes of relating to things and instead engage them as communicative beings.

We have used photography to show the limitations of a semiotic approach. There are also exemplary photographs that can help us appreciate how reverence becomes an aesthetic concept before we look at it from the

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22 Barthes, *Camera*, p. 87.

23 Ibid., 89.

24 Ibid., 79.

25 On the contrary, icons are continuously seen (and engaged) in the context of Orthodox liturgy and in the act of kissing itself (which is preceded by the veneration or *proskynesis* of the icon as e.g., gazing at and bowing before it prior to kissing it). Ibid.

26 Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York, 1977), p. 17.

27 Ibid.

theological standpoint. Take, for example, Sebastiao Salgado's iconic *Refugees in the Korem Camp, Ethiopia 1984*.[28]

Four figures wrapped in blankets are enveloped in a soft, palpable light. Each appears in a resigned but dignified isolation. The sky is overcast and shadows suggest a setting sun. Sand is diffused in the atmosphere and reaches the luminous clouds and softly outlined mountains in the distance. The soil is dusty and textured by wind and light. The face of the tall male figure on the right side of the frame is partially visible. The blanket that covers him is shaped in the wind's direction. As he and the two children move forward toward the viewer, a fourth figure (perhaps a woman) lingers in the background, face turned toward the distant mountains. Its presence there pulls the image in the opposite direction and brings it to a temporary stasis. The face is not visible but it is not hard to see it reflected in the figure's posture: uncertain or simply caught in the wind that inflates its sail-like shawl. Set lower in the foreground is the highlighted face of a child. Appearing close to the edge of the frame, it brings all movement to a standstill. His tilted head is defined by a protruding forehead, thin hair, large eyes and tender lips—an alternative landscape. There is more to see in this photograph but this brief encounter is sufficient to give us a sense of its integrity and autarky. Neither an analog nor a message, the image exists as a *sui generis* reality, a portion of world that is aesthetically configured.[29] The viewer is called—by the image itself—to enter and see.

In exemplarity the image possesses and dispenses its meanings. It has no need of ritual or collective acts of religious theater to make it meaningful or bring it to life.[30] There are paintings, photographs and icons that may need this kind of intervention. But there are also significant exceptions. When aesthetic perception is made dependent on ritual the aesthetic object is depleted. This is an old story. We can see it played out in the tension between cult object and work of art, in Belting's impressive study of the history of the Christian image.

According to Belting, the cult image loses its power in the Reformation. It then re-emerges in the public sphere as art and as the object of aesthetic experience. But other, more radical, processes are at work in this transition. To the post-Calvinist subject the world is an alien place. The art object is viable only as a simulacrum: "severed into the purely factual and the hidden signification of metaphor."[31] Where God once dwelled, the letter now enters and takes charge. The art object becomes mute and passive. Only the viewing subject's reified and erudite vision can bring it to (a rhetorical) life. For this object, no inherent, independent subsistence (and sanctity) is possible. The image is thoroughly scripted. Even though it appears to be full, it is actually

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[28] http://www.amazonasimages.com/travaux-sahel. Sebastiao Salgado, *Sahel: The End of the Road (Series in Contemporary Photography)* (Berkeley, 2004).

[29] C.A. Tsakiridou, "The Connatural Eye: Photography without Representation," *Philosophical Inquiry: International Quarterly*, 29/3–4 (Summer–Fall 2007): pp. 41–57.

[30] Pentcheva, "The Performative Icon."

[31] Belting, p. 15.

empty. This is not the kind of emptiness that one finds in the Ch'an painting or in abstract art. It is closer to a form of death (by erudition and metaphor).

We can place Barthes in this tradition. When he looks at the photographs that have moved him and sees "the corpse that is alive as *corpse*," the melancholic emanation that only his memory and imagination can revive, a similar vision of world and art is implied.[32] It is a vision turned toward the self that is now summoned to fill the empty image by making an intimate and arcane narrative the center of its loss. This, of course, is performance. Possessed by its subject, the image becomes first representation, then spectacle and finally a *memento mori*. It is forced to become a witness to its own fictitious death. But death happens elsewhere. In a world where being has no autarky or resilience, neither does the human subject. If the image dies, so must the one who now claims its being as his own proclaim his own death (by self-consuming desire): "In each of them, inescapably, I passed beyond the unreality of the thing represented, I entered crazily into the spectacle, into the image, taking into my arms what is dead, what is going to die."[33] This esotericism that turns vision into occultation and autoscopy contrasts with the overt reality of the exemplary image.

To see from inside, to take (or discover) the picture from the standpoint (literally) of being, is to allow everything in that landscape to emerge synergically. This is how vision becomes reverent. In *Refugees*, we follow the lines and contours of the child's forehead to the point where light brings out its full form. We let the man's face and gaze rest in the shadows and highlights that define it. We see him in this light and in his own (which the photograph cannot picture and yet it shows). The image has its rhythms, its own logic of disclosure. The seen suggests the unseen; it becomes its measure. The face that will remain invisible for all time is revealed through the faces of others and through what we typically take to be impersonal. It is absorbed in the sight of the vanishing mountain and floating land that is left behind. The landscape is its expression, its unfolding face. It does not matter that we cannot see everything as it is supposed to be seen. Where the body is covered the sand and dry soil show it. The wind blows, the sun turns the child's hair light and thin like hay. Its face sleeps or dreams in a time of its own, as if nothing has or will happen (again). And then it keeps on walking for that too is in the rhythm that is set by the image. These are only some of the motions with which the aesthetic object manifests itself and delivers its world.

In the exemplary photograph, photography itself comes to life and to its own being. It is not anymore a medium because there is nothing for it to deliver, no function of representation. Exemplarity begs reverence. The image becomes the place and the time (the impact of the 1960s and 1980s droughts on millions in Africa) that belongs to photography and its subjects but not as

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32 Barthes, *Camera*, p. 79.

33 Ibid., pp. 116–117. The passage concludes with a reference to Nietzsche's tearful embrace of a beaten horse, "gone mad for Pity's sake."



2.1 Josef Koudelka, *Ireland 1972*, Croagh Patrick Pilgrimage 1972, Magnum Photos

two distinct realities. It is as if a certain way of seeing has entered mountains, desert and human bodies and now moves in and with them in a shared world. Exemplarity shows in shorthand (in essence), where photography's (and the world's) being may be found. For all the complexity of the language that it takes to describe it, the exemplary image has a stark simplicity, a transparency that makes interpretation inevitable. Yet, anything said about famine, poverty, or the rhetoric of the lens, is only an epiphenomenon. In front of us, something is alive. Signs will come and go but this fact will not change. Where there is reverence, it is the immediate being of things, their act of being what or who they are that matters.

In Figure 2.1, a photograph by Josef Koudelka, a landscape of rock, water, mountains, clouds and sky is dominated by three kneeling figures looking past the frame as if absorbed in an unseen sight, each in its own way and time. Against the quiet stillness and softness of the luminous peaks and clouds, and what appears like a sea or river in the distance, the men seem solid and tangible, their legs and feet framed by what looks like a field of thick, angular limestone. Leaning on wooden sticks, they have a strange solitude. Streaks of light on their hands, shirts, fingers and forehead give off a sense of sudden and transient intensity. It is perhaps most pronounced in the robust figure on the left who seems to have just landed on his knees, his stick held like an oar. In his waving hair and flopping jacket a wind is made visible, blowing beneath a ceiling of clouds. So too with the man on the right whose more uncertain posture suggests fatigue or perhaps some ailment. The five standing figures

in the background seem to occupy a different world, as they gaze away almost casually in the opposite direction standing perhaps at the edge of a cliff or slope.

Light comes from the setting sun in the horizon. Diffused through the thick and vaporous clouds, it turns brilliant at the far right of the image where something like a water surface sparkles and again when it illuminates the men's shirts and collars and in the case of the shorter man in the middle, his well-defined hands. Subdued in shadow but not without texture, their clothes seem to envelop and conceal them and where details have vanished, to minimize their physical weight. Outside and beyond the frame one can almost see a falling darkness, the image projecting a visual and tactile time as if anticipating a moment that will forever remain invisible and yet ever present. Here we come to "see" through the convergence of time, space and being, a modality of presence in which photography's instantaneity is both intensified and annulled. The men who wear the darkness, the mountains and clouds that assume at moments the same consistency and yet persist in their distinct identities, the rugged and bone-like rocks spreading like a mosaic as they accommodate the knees and legs that rest on them, all these are elements of a reality that belongs to photography as much as to the world in which it happens and from where the unique being of its images arises.

As light permeates and transforms objects it imparts on them something of its own being. The sense in photography that things form right where light materializes or where matter concedes to be illuminated is ontological. Croagh Patrick had been a place of pilgrimage long before Christianity reached Ireland but in this instance or portion of world that the photograph constitutes, its reality is affirmed in the rocks and the men who kneel on them. What one knows about pilgrimages or the mountain itself is secondary. Those that have arrived to a destination from afar or after a strenuous ascent, will rest and inevitably gaze at what they have left behind—a look away or inside one's own being and perhaps beyond what is known or seen. Isn't this the essence of pilgrimage, an essence made plainly visible here in the actual being of things that this photograph has gathered in its frame and with which it has become consubstantial?

This is a good point to transition to the relationship between exemplarity and its contexts. In exemplarity an image exists in its own being and space. It takes possession of its subjects and they take possession of it. It stands alone, but it is also a crossroads of multiple worlds. Exemplarity does not decontextualize or dehistoricize as some might expect. The exemplary image is normal in this regard. It is possible to detect in it the traces and paths of different histories and make them an object of study. But it will be a mistake to see only these markings and their effects, to make the image a token of its time. Since we will be working within the sphere of "Byzantine" art, it is good to get a general sense of its histories, the questions that they raise and the manner in which they frame exemplarity.

It is an art that is highly versatile and cosmopolitan. Ancient icons from different parts of the empire survive to this day in the monasteries and sketes of Mount Athos in Greece, while some of the earliest images of Christianity may be found in the Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai.[34] They come from the Paleologean period, the Italo-Byzantine style, the Macedonian School, the Cretan School of Theophanes, or workshops associated with masters like the thirteenth century painter Manuel Panselinos, Theophanes the Greek (c. 1340–c. 1410) and his student Andrei Rublev. They resonate with ideas, styles, techniques and aesthetic and theological priorities that intrigue the historian and archaeologist. We have classical icons and folk icons. The latter were idealized by Modernists and revivalists alike, as we shall see. Russian folk icons recall Indo-Catholic votive art like the Mexican *retablo*.[35] They open windows to the fluid boundaries between iconographies in the cultures of Christianity and beyond.

Here it is important to point out that even though exemplarity cannot be confined *a priori* to a particular kind of style, it is more compatible with certain styles than it is with others. In Syria and Egypt, for example, the combination of Hellenistic naturalism and hieratic forms created an iconography dominated by rhythmical, rigidly stylized compositions and decorative motifs (e.g., in fifth- and sixth-century Coptic art).[36] In medieval Egypt and Syria, an Islamic aesthetic defined not only decorative motifs but also the rendering of the human figure from which motion and vivacity were absent.[37] In general, works in the Syriac, Coptic, Persian or Arabic style that strive to convey symbolic, narrative and devotional content—e.g., the Sinai icons *Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace* and *Virgin Enthroned*—lack the expressive complexity and subtlety required by exemplarity.[38] It is not therefore surprising that most of the examples discussed in this study were produced in sophisticated artistic and theological centers or under their influence.

Occasionally, exemplary images appear in places where, through geographical proximity, conquest, commerce or exile (e.g., that of Theophanes the Greek in Russia) syncretism flourished. The influence of Greek and

[34] Thelma K. Thomas, "The Arts of Christian Communities in the Medieval Middle East," in Helen C. Evans (ed.), *Byzantium: Faith and Power* (New Haven, 2004), pp. 415–447. See also Evans, "Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)," pp. 11–12. On connections between St. Catherine's at Sinai and Cyprus, see Kurt Weitzmann, "A Group of Early Twelfth-Century Sinai Icons Attributed to Cyprus," in Giles Robertson and George Henderson (eds.), *Studies in Memory of David Talbot Rice* (Edinburgh, 1975), pp. 47–63.

[35] Marcus B. Burke, "On the Spanish Origins of Mexican Retablos," in Elizabeth Zarur and Charles Lovell (eds.), *Art and Faith in Mexico: The Nineteenth Century Retablo Tradition* (Albuquerque, 2001), pp. 39–45.

[36] David Talbot Rice, *Art of the Byzantine Era* (London, 1963), pp. 22–36. Also, D.V. Ainalov, *The Hellenistic Origins of Byzantine Art*, trans. S. Sobolevich (New Brunswick, 1961), pp. 192–194.

[37] For examples, see Thomas, "The Arts of Christian Communities."

[38] Rice, pp. 24–26.

Roman portraiture on the icon is well documented. Classical and Hellenistic sculpture also influenced the iconography of Bactrian, Greco-Indian, southeast Asian and Chinese Buddhism.[39] The famous sixth-century Sinai icon of *Christ Pantocrator* embodies the same intensity of personal presence that the funerary portrait from nearby Fayum reserved for the living souls of the deceased.[40] Painted in encaustic with the mastery of human form and expression achieved by classical Greek art, these images are both indigenous and alien to the geography that defined them. Particularly when viewed as symptomatic of Greek and Roman appropriation of Egyptian cult, they have a complex and fragile polysemy.

But for us this is not the point of interest. In these images, other realities persist which are far more relevant to our discussion. The expressive possibilities of line and color were well-known to Greek painters from antiquity. The story of how Apelles of Ephesus and Protogenes of Rhodes recognized each other by the delicacy and precision of the lines they drew on a panel—the panel was eventually exhibited in public—is told by Pliny, as if to suggest the acuity of aesthetic vision and the indulgence it could generate.[41] If painting could be so intense, then we can understand why it was Protogenes who, again according to Pliny, ate only soaked lupins while working on his painting of *Ialysus*, determined to "satisfy at once his hunger and his thirst without blunting his faculties by overindulgence."[42]

Such asceticism may have a dose of hyperbole but it is consistent with another incident relayed by the same source. Protogenes was once very upset that he could not give a vivid impression of a panting dog: "it was foam painted with the brush, not frothing from the mouth."[43] Exasperated, he threw the sponge that was used to wipe color off his painting at the animal's mouth and finally achieved the desired effect. Painting fulfills its nature when it becomes part of life. The painter fasts for that acuity of sense and impulse that penetrates life the moment it happens. Protogenes wanted vivacity and got it by acting on the image instinctively. Art that takes hold of a thing's life and makes it its own is on the verge of painting eternal realities. It becomes

[39] Thomas McEvilley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies* (New York, 2002), pp. 363–392.

[40] On Fayum portraits and Byzantine icons, see Euphrosyne Doxiadis, *The Mysterious Fayum Portraits: Faces from Ancient Egypt* (New York, 1995), pp. 90–92. For the response of the early Church to the veneration of the portraits of heads of philosophical schools and religious sects, and to funerary portraiture in general, see Grabar, pp. 85–86. See also Ainalov, pp. 212–213.

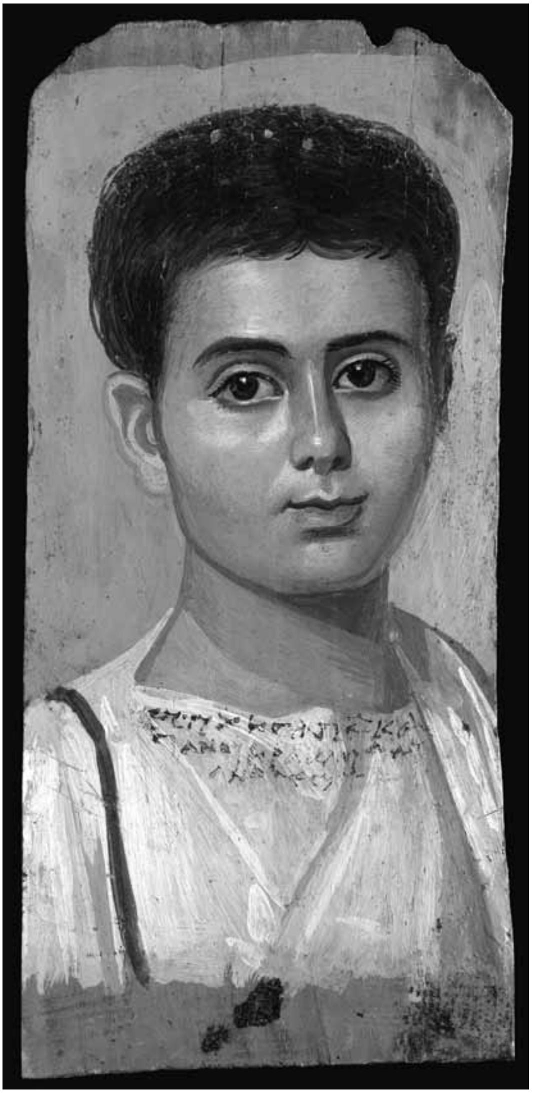
[41] Pliny the Elder, *The Elder Pliny's Chapters on the History of Art*, trans. K. Jex-Blake and E. Sellers (Chicago, 1968), pp. 121–123 (xxxv 81–83). Examples of extant ancient Greek paintings that reflect mastery of the painted line in Alekos V. Levides (ed.), *Plinios o Presvyteros: Peri Archaias Ellenikes Zographikes*, trans. T. Roussos and A. Levides (Athens, 1994), pp. 318–323 (pl. #15, 16); Vincent J. Bruno, *Form and Colour in Greek Painting* (London, 1977), pl. #1–16.

[42] Pliny, pp. 138–139 (xxxv 101–102). See also Doxiadis, p. 91.

[43] Pliny, p. 139 (xxxv 102–103).

so agile and sensitive that it can capture the souls of the departed and its own soul as well. This is something that Japanese painting and poetry also recognize and practice.

In the Fayum portrait, the living person suspends the death mask. Placed over the face of the deceased, the image takes over the life of the body that lies mummified (reified) underneath. It affirms the futility of death and the transcending integrity of art and life. Art captures the soul in action, in the moment where it becomes expression, form, complexion, posture. It encounters it at a depth that surpasses its philosophical exegesis (then and now) where the concept (even of *hypostasis*) always remains disembodied and oblivious to the particular. This is the living actuality of the body, the transubstantiation of carnality in the aesthetic moment that is so evident in the *Portrait of the Boy Eutyches* (Figure 2.2).[44]



2.2 *Portrait of the Boy Eutyches*, 100–150 A.D., The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, N.Y.

It is not the boy's likeness that we see. The image does not resemble an original because it possesses its object just as it is being possessed by it. Eutyches *is here*. The realization of living form right where its reality is challenged (literally over the corpse), is how the image asserts its autarky and aesthetic personhood. As we indicated earlier in the case of photographic exemplarity, what culture adduces to this act is secondary if not irrelevant. Image and reality converge in a trans-imaginal and trans-real being. To this event culture is a witness not a mediator. Nothing lies outside the image. It stands alone, in charge of its own reality.

In her definitive study of these portraits, Doxiadis comes close to recognizing their ontological distinctiveness:

> The juxtaposition of the Fayum portraits to the corpse gives them, in our eyes, a spiritual eerie quality which sets them far apart from social portraiture and places them in a class of their own. Even away from the mummy, they retain their metaphysical potency. It is as if the portrait had really become the person it describes who now continues to be alive in a different realm.[45]

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44 Doxiadis, pp. 32–33.
45 Ibid., p. 82.

Another instance of aesthetic personhood is in this funerary inscription from Egypt:

Although the painter gave his work no voice,
Yet still you'll swear you hear Eurprepios,
If ever to his portrait men draw near,
They strain their ears, as though they could half hear:
'I am Euprepios, the little one's my daughter's' …[46]

The Fayum portrait is literally attached to the dead and participates in death rituals. But its integrity is not affected. The metaphysical power assigned to them by Doxiadis is actually aesthetic. It is the result of their intense evocation of life and their personal and dominating presence. Some among them appear caught in the light of this reality—long before photography came to be. Like the moving lips of the departed Euprepios, the light absorbed in the modeling of Eutyches' face and poignantly reflected in his eyes, imparts a liveliness that ordinary faces do not possess. This is the moment (extended in time) when painting itself breaks the silence of the mimetic object and registers as voice. Conversely, it is also the moment when nature ceases to be the measure of life and becomes art's reflection.

It is in connection to these moments and their ontological power that knowledge of Egypt's cult of the dead and its evolution under Greek and Roman rule becomes aesthetically relevant. At some point in Egypt's encounter with the Greek and Roman artistic traditions, the inertness (silence) of the painted image was broken in a way that resonated with the sensibility of those who saw the mummy as a holy being, imbued with the divinity of Osiris and Isis, but could not see it as a person.[47] Something happened during the reign of Tiberius (14–37 A.D.) that caused these portraits to replace the three-dimensional masks used in the native cult. Whatever it was, it would have entailed the recognition in the painted image of something extraordinary: the divinized presence of the deceased, the revelation of the personal reality of their being that (in past times) the mask had concealed and trapped into non-existence for thousands of years.

This kind of image exists on the verge of immortality. It stands between two worlds and does so by means of its own aesthetic being. It was, perhaps, in moments like this that art assumed the power that it exercised on the Christian imagination, a power that cult was to appropriate and simulate in its miraculous images (e.g., the *acheiropoietai*). Positing this kind of aesthetic being as the precondition of the cult of the image helps explain why Iconoclasm could never succeed where art had given such compelling evidence of its ontopoetic power. The demand that art have a spiritual life was formulated by theology but it was originally conceived by art and delivered in its own terms, as it should be. This is the reason that some Modernists longed for a spirituality that would belong only to art.

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46 Ibid., p. 87.
47 Ibid., pp. 39–40.

The vital role played by art in the experience of life and nature during the first centuries of the Christian era is well-established. Between the fourth and eighth centuries, Byzantine wall painting gave exquisite examples of continuity with Hellenistic precedents. This is evident in its use of polychromy and brilliantly gilded backgrounds, and the depiction of animal and fauna life in homes, churches and in the everyday clothing of affluent adults and children.[48] Aesthetic appreciation existed side by side with a theology that questioned the contribution of the senses to the experience of God. St. John Chrysostom (c. 347–407) may have criticized the ostentatious decorations of Christian homes, but polychromy was common in church interiors. An early sixth-century description of the church of St. Stephen at Gaza by the rhetorician Choricios of Gaza—with noticeable allusions to Homeric verse (d. 450)—records contemporary impressions.[49]

In the fifth century, even an ascetic like St. Neilus of Sinai (d. c. 430) who counseled vigilance against all sensory objects, expressed delight at the sight of the vivid description of sea life and fishing genres on the walls of a church: "the casting of nets into the sea, and all sorts of fish being caught by the fishermen's hands."[50] Neilus recommended the painting of scenes of aquatic and animal life on church walls. Sensitivity to sensuous qualities found in works of art and in nature, particularly the effect of color, is also evident in the writings of St. Gregory of Nyssa (c. 332–c. 384). Gregory finds "a pear whiter than new polished ivory" and delights in the combination of color, texture and light, when he writes in the *Life of Moses*: "blue is interwoven with violet and scarlet mingled with white and among them is woven threads of gold, the variety of colors shine with a remarkable beauty."[51]

This is not to underestimate tensions in Christianity's relationship with the body and the senses—unless redeemed, they obstructed salvation. The view shared by all Iconoclasts that to paint divinity is to degrade it, goes back to Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis in Cyprus (d. 403).[52] Not only the depiction of divine and holy beings but actually sensuous perception (of interior and exterior objects) itself came to be viewed with suspicion, as conducive to sinful pleasures and self-indulgence. Excesses associated with image worship preoccupied Christian theologians long before the Muslim conquests.[53]

48 Ainalov, pp. 186–187.

49 Ibid., pp. 187, 196–198. See also Mango, *Art*, pp. 69–70, 62, 64. Choricios describes the architecture and decoration of another church in Gaza dedicated to St. Sergius. Pictures (*historiai*) of certain birds (e.g., nightingale) were excluded because of their association with secular poetry.

50 Ainalov, pp. 196–197. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware (eds. and trans.), *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* (3 vols, London, 1979), vol. 1, p. 235.

51 As quoted in Gervase Mathew, "The Aesthetic Theories of Gregory of Nyssa," in Giles Robertson and George Henderson (eds.), *Studies in Memory of David Talbot Rice* (Edinburgh, 1975), pp. 217–222, 219, 220.

52 Mango, *The Art*, pp. 41–43.

53 In 724 Umayyad Caliph Yazid II issued a decree ordering the destruction of images in all Christian churches. The 727 iconoclastic decree of Leo III the Isaurian (717–741) has led some scholars to entertain Muslim influence on Byzantine Iconoclasm. Sahas on the

Symbolic representation using the cross, birds, animals, monograms and letters, prevalent in the early centuries, particularly in the art of the catacombs, was favored by those who insisted that figuration and divinity were incompatible.[54] But where theophany was not an issue, the human form remained art's legitimate (and celebrated) subject. In the eighth and ninth centuries, the same Byzantine Iconoclasts (726–843) who banned images of Christ, the Virgin Mary and the saints, had their portraits painted on the walls of their houses in the polychrome style of antiquity.[55]

The use of painting terms by theologians in biblical exegesis attests to the vivacity accorded to images, and the desire to see Christ painted alive. The reality and physicality of Christ was often contrasted with the vague sketches of the Old Testament. They were the empty figures in which he would pour his being as if it were pigment. In the fifth century, Cyril of Alexandria referred to the Old Testament as a "*skiagraphia*," an "underdrawing" which the New Testament would fill with bright colors.[56] Christ's body would enter the written text like color enters the outline of a figure and gives it the resonance of life.

John Damascene (c. 676–749) quotes a version of the same trope from St. John Chrystostom (c. 347–407). It describes Melchisedek as a "*proskiasma*" or "foreshadowing" and Christ as the colors (*chromasi*).[57] The same idea leads Nicephorus, Patriarch of Constantinople (806–815), to call Iconoclasts "persecutors of color, or rather, persecutors of Christ."[58] Even where the priority was to have the image intimate its archetype and leave its animation to liturgy and prayer, the experience of aesthetic vivacity never left theological rhetoric.[59] It is notably present, as we shall see in Chapter 10, in Damascene.

Color and aesthetic qualities have played an important role in non-Christian iconographies that depict transcendental realities. To understand the distinctiveness of Christian exemplarity better, it is good to discuss briefly the role of painting in the Ch'an (Zen) Buddhist tradition. Aesthetic

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contrary argues that the preservation of icons, mosaics and frescos in Muslim regions during iconoclasm points to "internal and indigenous theological reasons." Sahas, pp. 18–21.

54 During the two centuries of Iconoclasm, mosaics and frescos with a variety of nature genres were preserved and replaced sacred images. Ainalov, pp. 197–197.

55 Ibid., p. 190. On Iconoclast self-portraiture in coinage and the replacement of Christian subjects with profane scenes from the hippodrome etc., see Alain Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago, 2000), p. 124. See also Pelikan, pp. 7–39. For a general discussion of church and state relations in Byzantium, see Steven Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity: A Study of the Patriarchate of Constantinople from the Eve of the Turkish Conquest to the Greek War of Independence* (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 55–74.

56 Herbert Kessler, "Pictures Fertile with Truth: How Christians Managed to Make Images of God without Violating the Second Commandment," *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, 49–50 (1991–1992): pp. 53–65.

57 PG94: 1361D–1364A.

58 Kessler, "Pictures Fertile with Truth."

59 Alexander Kazhdan and Henry Maguire, "Byzantine Hagiographical Texts as Sources on Art," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 45 (1991): 1–22.

theory in both Chinese and Japanese Buddhist art has a long and significant history; aesthetics is in many instances a form of ascetism. Conversely, enlightenment has an inherently aesthetic dimension which is why, as we shall see later, exemplarity comes naturally to the Ch'an painting. Paintings and calligraphy seek to capture in form the fusion of consciousness and absolute reality. These works are of particular interest to us because they reach a level of exemplarity that in certain respects resembles that of the Christian image. Consistent with Ch'an ontology, the aesthetic object takes the form of a phenomenon rather than a *hypostatic* being. In Buddhism there is no *hypostasis* as such (for that is itself a phenomenon or construct of consciousness and as such subject to the law of emptiness).

In Ch'an Buddhism the expression of transcendental experience in aesthetic form is highly regarded. In their most accomplished instances, painting, calligraphy and poetry not only record but actually *constitute* instances of enlightenment. Chinese painting in particular has an ancient and distinguished tradition of infusing aesthetic principles with Taoist and later Buddhist ideas. They include the concepts of spirited vitality, emptiness, spirit-resonance, harmonization of consciousness and nature, and self-existence or mysterious fitness (*miao li*), among others (see Chapter 15). *Miao li* refers to the reflection in a painting of the ineffable spiritual unity of things.[60] One must be able to penetrate contemplatively (*guan*) the substance of form (via sustained and fixed attention) but also to see it unfold as if it were a text and engage in an act of reading (*du hua*).[61]

The concept of *chi'yün* or spirit-resonance, requires of the painter to capture a thing the very moment it arises in consciousness and affects the heart.[62] The life movement of the mind is transferred over to the object and records its passing form. The Ch'an rejection of dualities is expressed in the counsel "let the essence of mind and all phenomenal objects exist in a state of thusness." It applies to the technical and conceptual aspects of painting, as we read in a twelfth-century essay by Han Cho: "the ideas must all be in the eye before they are carried out with the brush."[63] In Zen, enlightenment materializes in the painter's idiosyncratic grasp of the moment, a quality of instantaneity that the painting retains.[64]

Consider, for example, the famous drawing of three overlapping figures, a circle (*ensō*), triangle and square (*The Circle, Triangle and Square*, early nineteenth century), by Sengai (1750–1837), a monk of the Rinzai order. According to Shōkin Furuta, it is filled with "transformation and

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60 Osvald Siren, *The Chinese on the Art of Painting: Texts by the Painter-Critics, from the Han through the Ch'ing Dynasties* (Mineola, 2005), pp. 26–28, 106–108.

61 Craig Clunas, "Practices of Vision," in Rebecca M. Brown and Deborah S. Hutton (eds.), *Asian Art* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 352–361.

62 Ibid., pp. 77–87.

63 Ibid., pp. 101, 82.

64 Shōkin Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, trans. Reiko Tsukimura (Tokyo, 2000), pp. 37–38.

movement, the condition of being unfixed in either time or space" and as such "draws enlightenment itself."[65] Viewed from right to left, the three figures diminish in intensity and proximity to the viewer. The pale wash of ink in the rectangle and its receding position in relation to the triangle and superimposed circle, impart movement and an atmospheric quality on the composition. These contrast with its readily evident geometric and abstract character. The intensity and dynamism of the *ensō* painted in a thick and quick brushstroke, in dark ink, contrast with the isosceles triangle which functions as a balancing center and link or transition point between the other two figures. Far from imposing itself on the image, the inscription has the same ambiguous quality. It reads: "The first Zen monastery in Japan."

Like life, writes Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, no single act of *sumiye* (ink) painting can be repeated: "once done, it is never undone."[66] "Caught while the thing is going on," Zen and the act of painting belong to the instantaneous, irreversible contact between mind and world. This is where the painted object attains its vivacity and vital presence.[67] Presence here is a function of the object's transience—its being in an absolute sense in the present and passing moment (or now)—rather than permanence. It is the integrity of the instance itself that matters rather than the integrity of the being that exists in it. Being is dominated by temporality; the ontology of things is that of the time in which their being is both formed and eroded. There is no sense of timeless presence—the forever *is* the now. It is not *in* the now.

The viewer's direct and "unclouded" grasp of an object is an act of union, and a suspension of dual existence, as noted in the case of tea ware by Soetsu Yanagi (1889–1991): "The thing went into them, and they went into the thing."[68] Similarly in poetry, as the great poet and critic Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694) explains, the poem arises out of the fusion of self and object. The object's inner nature is revealed: "Learn about a pine tree from a pine tree and about a bamboo plant from a bamboo plant."[69] Like a painting, a poem forms spontaneously out of the symbiosis of life, feeling and world. Intimate to the poet, it is equally intimate to its subject whose expression or realization it becomes.[70]

Emphasis on vital form in Ch'an and Zen painting (and calligraphy) made it possible to reconcile aesthetic distinctiveness with iconographic conformity. Far from being restrictive, conventions actually furnished a framework for cultivating both iconographic orthodoxy and uniqueness.

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65 Ibid., pp. 42–43, 46. The circle (*ensō*) is common in Zen painting but the combination with the rectangle and triangle is not and accounts for the uniqueness of this image.

66 This passage is quoted in Siren, pp. 106–107.

67 Ibid., p. 107.

68 See Soetsu Yanagi, "The Kizaemon Tea Bowl," in Brown and Hutton, pp. 424–430.

69 Makoto Ueda, *The Master Haiku Poet Matsuo Bashō* (Tokyo, 1982), p. 167.

70 Ibid., pp. 167–168.

Thus, the seventeenth century painter Shih T'ao observed that the search for originality culminated in the realization that the painter had all along been working according to the "Tao of the ancients."[71] Instructive for exploring the relationship between tradition and vital form in the Christian image, the Chinese and later Japanese emphasis on the co-existence of *gu'i* (Japanese *ko'i*) or form that evokes the ancient spirit, and "spirit-resonance" (Japanese *kiin*), reflect a keen interest in fusing tradition and originality.[72]

The iconographies and aesthetics of Christianity and Buddhism should be understood in the context of their differences. Buddhists consider the Buddha an enlightened being among many past and future Buddhas who are in charge of their eternal emanations. They are manifested in deities, various adepts, reincarnates etc. In Buddhism, beings submit as agents and recipients of actions to an impersonal and universal law of cause and effect. In Christianity, by contrast, they are sustained by divine providence and mercy dispensed by a personal God. Christianity has theology; Buddhism only metaphysics. The perfection of personality that comes to the Christian ascetic as a result of purification, illumination and deification does not have a parallel in the Buddhist meditator. In Buddhism, one meditates in order to disengage cognition from all categorial dualities, empty personality and reconfigure it to a modality of consciousness for which anything personal is an accident of existence rather than its fulfilment.

An ascetic theology, as we have defined it, starts from the notion of the human person as a self-determined existent who cooperates with God, and extends this notion to all beings (the mark of graced or *kata charin* existence). This is not the view of the human person in Buddhism where self-subsistence and identity are delusions. From an Orthodox perspective, the integral existence of the person is inseparable from the perfecting synergy in all things of grace and creation. In Buddhism, integral existence (e.g., the self or irreducible individual person as such) is rejected. Ontology becomes epistemology (or anthropology—as happens ultimately with metaphysical views of transcendence). Being arises in the act of perception and is inseparable from it and the perceiving subject.

For both traditions, however, vivacity in the art object is a prized quality. When consciousness and feeling penetrate things in their moment of mutual emptiness and their presence resonates in the pine or bamboo of the *sumiye* image, art and enlightenment converge. When persons and things exist in a state of enunciating silence, as beings that transcend in their act of existence

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71 Mai-Mai Sze, *The Tao of Painting: A Study of the Ritual Disposition of Chinese Painting* (2 vols, London, 1957), vol. 1, p. 5.

72 Melanie Trede, "Terminology and Ideology: Coming to Terms with 'Classicism' in Japanese Art-Historical Writing," in Elizabeth Lillehoj (ed.), *Critical Perspectives on Classicism in Japanese Painting, 1600–1700* (Honolulu, 2004), pp. 30–32. On the co-existence of personal expression and adherence to tradition in the early Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), see Marsha Weidner, "The Conventional Success of Chen Shu," in Brown and Hutton, pp. 380–394.

the aesthetic form that defines them and their own finality, the icon becomes an instance of theophany in art. Seen from this perspective, exemplary paintings and icons do not simply convey the truths of Ch'an Buddhism and Orthodoxy. They embody and realize them in their distinctive way, as we shall have occasion to see later. This movement in the art object, as we have already mentioned, points to *enargeia*.

3

Enargeia and Key Concepts

The specific hypostatic act that distinguishes the exemplary image aesthetically can be conveyed by the term *enargeia* (*evidential* or *illustratio* in Latin). The adjective *enarges* means bright, shining, distinct, glistening and with regard to the fleeting quality of light, swift in motion. It was used in Homer to suggest the appearance of a divine being in plain or disguised form.[1] Greek and Roman writers used the term to describe the vivid, life-like appearance of a person, object, or event in life, art or literature, and the impact of such a sight on the viewer or listener. In the first centuries of the Christian era, *enargeia* and its cognates were used extensively in rhetorical exercises associated with *ekphraseis*, known as *progymnasmata*, to describe the manner in which speech visually realizes its object and in this respect resembles a painting.[2] The second century rhetorician Hermogenes defined *ekphrasis* as a type of verbal description that operates "*enargos*" or brings intense visual experience to the listening act.[3] Words bring things to sight as if they were present in their sensuous, living form in front of the listener.

Enargeia and *phantasia* (i.e., the faculty where vivid images from experience are stored and activated) were adopted by Hellenistic literary critics from philosophy and became key notions in theories of *ekphraseis*.[4] This philosophical background is important to consider briefly. In Plato's *Ion*, the rhapsode Ion calls Socrates' account of his inspired impersonation of Homeric characters *enarges* not only because Socrates vividly (and brilliantly) described the dramatic effect of his performance on the audience, but also because the vividness of his account reflected the ecstatic way in

1 Pietro Pucci, "Gods' Intervention and Epiphany in Sophocles," *The American Journal of Philology*, 115/1 (Spring 1994): pp. 15–46, 16. The reference is to Odyssey 16.155ff and the appearance of Athena to Odysseus.

2 Liz James and Ruth Webb, "To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places: *Ekphrasis* and Art in Byzantium," *Art History*, 14/1 (March 1991): pp. 1–17.

3 G. Zanker, "*Enargeia* in the Ancient Criticism of Poetry," *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*, 124 (1981): pp. 297–311. See also James and Webb, "To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places."

4 James and Webb, "To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places." See also Zanker, "*Enargeia* in the Ancient Criticism of Poetry."

which Ion was transported to the world of Homer's characters during the performance (535C). Speech that has *enargeia* realizes its objects and brings their reality to bear upon the senses and the intellect. Socrates' account—a performance in its own right—merits this description because of its accuracy and penetrating insight.

In the *Phaedrus* (250D) the term is used to describe the brilliant manifestation of the form of beauty in things.[5] By contrast, the same brilliance applied to the form of wisdom (*phronesis*) would result in an image or thing (*eidolon enarges*) so lucid and brilliant that the senses would not be able to perceive it. In *Statesman* 277c, in a passage that recalls the comparison of Christ to color in Patristic writing (see below), Plato associates *enargeia* with the fusion of different pigments and color shades (*pharmakois … kai tei synkrasei ton chromaton*) which must be added to the outline (*perigraphen*) of a figure to make it lively and life-like (*hosper zoon*)—in the manner of a living thing.[6] In this context the term suggests the ability of color to impart motion or animation to a shape or form.

In *Poetics* 1455a and 1462ab, Aristotle uses *enarges* to suggest the creative aspect of visualization in playwriting and the audience's response to the outcome. Epicurus (341–270 B.C.) uses *enarges* and *enargeia* to describe the clear and reliable impressions (*phantasiai*) made by visual objects on the perceiving mind, impressions which in his view form the foundation of all knowledge.[7]

According to G. Zanker, the noun *enargeia* is of "particular importance for all ancient literary theory" and as such predates the use of *ekphrasis* (the standard term for highly descriptive writing), while its origin as a critical term is philosophical in nature.[8] Writing that was capable of recreating the actual presence of events and beings was expected of orators and historians.[9] In his definition of the term, Dionysius of Halicarnassus (fl. c. 20 B.C.) describes Lysias' style as having "abundant *enargeian*" (*enargeian pollen*) and explains that his writing makes characters so vivid that they are seen "face-to-face … as if they were present" (*prosopois omilein … hosper parousin*), while events are described as if they are "actually happening" (*ginomena*).[10] Here, *enargeia* is that quality in the description of a thing or incident that creates the impression of its actual presence and occurrence. It is readily perceptible and coincides with the act of reading or performing a text. Images that have *enargeia* behave as facts or realities rather than as the interior, mental objects that they actually are.

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5 *Phaedrus* 250D is discussed by Jean-Luc Marion but not with reference to *enargeia*. See Marion, p. 68.

6 Zanker, "*Enargeia* in the Ancient Criticism of Poetry," p. 307.

7 Ibid., pp. 308–309.

8 Ibid., pp. 297, 304–310.

9 Walker, "*Enargeia* and the Spectator in Greek Historiography."

10 The passage is quoted in Zanker, "*Enargeia* in the Ancient Criticism of Poetry," p. 297. See also Heath, "Absent Presences of Paul and Christ."

Quintilian (c. 35–c. 99) associates *enargeia* with the formation of an object in the mind of a listener that has the appearance and resonance of an actual being.[11] *Enargeia* makes words turn into images and images turn into perceptual realities. It moves from verbal to visual imagery, from abstract to concrete form. The aim is "to show what happened rather than tell it" by depicting the dramatic moments of an event (e.g., screams or groans in the case of a man being murdered) and recreating its actual happening in psychological and perceptual time.[12] Thus Quintilian observes that *enargeia* brings a thing known to be absent to credible presence: "images of absent things are represented to the mind in such a way that we seem to see them with our eyes and to be in their presence."[13] Essential to the credibility of the *enargic* description is the capturing of the factual and psychological dynamism of an event or character. This is an instance in which rhetoric imitates painting and sculpture where this dynamism finds sensuous expression. Lucian (120–c. 180), for example, compares the "very vivid display" (*enargestata epideixai*) of events in historiography—so vivid that "one sees the spoken" (*oran ta legomena*)—to the expressive power of Phidias' sculpture.[14] The conversion from verbal to visual happens as one hears or reads the description but presupposes an audience with a repertory of dynamic visual experiences in art and life.

Aelian (c. 170–c. 235) links *enarges* with *phantasia* (from *phainesthai*, to appear or be made visible). The term suggests both the exterior (physical, sensuous) and interior (mental) presence of an object and the presence of the activity that generates it. Aelian thus describes the unveiling of a picture of a running soldier which was so vivid (*enargesteran ten phantasian*) that when a trumpet was sounded, those in attendance saw him passing in front of their very eyes.[15] The painting in that instance was experienced as an actual act of running—a kind of running-picture, as Wittgenstein might say—rather than as a picture creating that impression.

In such contexts, *phantasia* acquires ontological significance. In Ovid, for example, the term is used to describe the object-forming and animating impact of words on the listener's mind. In *phantasia* things emerge as if they were actually present: "we seem to see them with our eyes and have them in our presence (*praesentes*)."[16] *Phantasia* identifies a distinct type of mental

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[11] Eugene Vance, *Mervelous Signals: Poetics and Sign Theory in the Middle Ages* (Lincoln, 1986), pp. 336–337. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, i.ii.30, trans. and ed. H.E. Butler, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, 1921), viii.iii.68–70, viii.vi.5, x.i.16, viii.1.16.

[12] Ruth Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Farnham, 2009), p. 94.

[13] Ibid. p. 95.

[14] Heath, "Absent Presences of Paul and Christ."

[15] J.J. Pollitt, *The Ancient View of Greek Art: Criticism, History, and Terminology* (New Haven, 1974), p. 293. See also Vance, p. 335.

[16] Philip Hardie, *Ovid's Poetics of Illusion* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 5. See also Quintilian Inst. 6.2.29 quoted in Politt, p. 293. For the emotional component in *phantasiai*, see Ellen Perry, *The Aesthetics of Emulation in the Visual Arts of Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 158–160.

image that presents vividly what is constant in the appearance of a thing and in this way captures its essential qualities. It presupposes the perception of multiple instances and the engagement of its object in some kind of activity. But it can also happen as a result of a very powerful first encounter with a thing or person.

Thus, in Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 B.C.–c. 50) it is the sharp initial impression (*typosis*, *sphragis*) left by an external object on the mind.[17] The addition of successive encounters, in the course of which an object's original image is refined and further distinguished, is found in Porphyry's biography of Plotinus (see also Chapter 11). In this well-known story, Porphyry tells of the famous Alexandrian painter Carterius who painted Plotinus' portrait from memory, using only the increasingly accurate mental impressions (*phantasias plektikoteras*) that he collected from his careful (almost photographic) observation of the philosopher at work.[18] Through this mental sketching, the many appearances or impressions of Plotinus that he collected there were combined to form the philosopher's distinctive features.

Phantasia in this sense includes the mental object that is formed as a result of singular or multiple visual contacts with a thing, event or person. It is determined by the characteristic qualities made evident in the actual acts of existence in which things engage. When this image translates into a painting, the painted object appears as if it were actually present or alive. The distinctiveness and dynamism of the mental image is transferred to its plastic equivalent. Here precision extends beyond verisimilitude to penetrate the essence of a person, object or event and to do so in the course of its characteristic activities so that the subject of the painting is captured living its nature rather than merely as a likeness or impression. This aspect of *enargeia* should qualify our association of the term with illusion. *Enargeia*, as Ruth Webb observes, may be "always a matter of illusion" but it is also a matter of realization.[19] In the case of the art object, this realization is aesthetic.

In his *Commentaries on Aphthonius* of Antioch (late fourth century), the ninth-century Byzantine theologian Ioannes Sardianus, calls speech that has *enargeia* "alive" or "breathing" (*empnous*), this condition being the result of the precision and clarity or lucidity it has achieved.[20] These two qualities then are *enargic* to the extent that they reach this state and not otherwise. *Enarges* is used in this sense by Ioannes Eugenikos, a fifteenth-century Byzantine official, scholar and author of *ekphraseis*, to describe the manner in which painted objects project their form out of the picture plane and engage the viewer

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17 In time memory will fade and the mental image will lose its sharpness (*lethe amydron ergasetai e pantelos aphanise*) (Immut. 43). Philo of Alexandria, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. C.D. Yonge (Peabody, 1993), p. 161. See also, Arkadi Choufrine, *Gnosis, Theophany, Theosis: Studies in Clement of Alexandria's Appropriation of His Background*, Patristic Studies, ed. Gerald Brary (New York, 2002), p. 84.

18 Pollitt, *Ancient View*, p. 295. Zanker, "*Enargeia* in the Ancient Criticism of Poetry."

19 Webb, p. 103.

20 Ibid., pp. 205–206.

as if they were actual beings.[21] Commenting on this concept in Eugenikos, A.I. Pallas notes: "things are depicted as '*enarge*' only when they appear to protrude from the plane on which they are painted and to thus participate in life together with their viewers."[22]

We have actually seen this movement in Koudelka's *Ireland 1972* and in the portrait of *Eutyches*. The experience of *this* particular person existing in a time-frame realized by its own act of being what it is, in the midst of the world it inhabits, with its identity and meaning realized in a moment that its image totally possesses, is not different from that of Aelian's runner. What stands out in both is a kind of actuality that cancels the distinction between image (copy) and original, between life and art.

A painting of a withering tree in a desert landscape has *enargeia* when all the elements that constitute it are depicted in their distinctive and synchronic manner of existence. The desert is shown as the particular kind of landscape that it is, the tree as the particular kind of tree that it is (e.g., a date palm tree) and as withering before our eyes. The withering itself is determined by the particular qualities of the parts or aspects of the image in which it is taking place (the leaves, branches, trunk, sky, light, landscape etc.). Much can be said from a historical or religious point of view about deserts and date palm trees. But nothing said in that context will make a difference to the aesthetic object at hand which is subject to its own, indigenous reality—it has, in that sense, its own world, its own ways of being with itself and with others and of communicating in those acts its own existence.

Thus *enargeia* makes it possible for an image to signify from within its own space rather than from an external position determined by the intentions of individuals (e.g., the artist) or institutions (e.g., the Church). The result is a unique and autarkic being which retains its integrity even when some of its aspects inevitably place it in a specific historical, political and theological matrix. In such cases, the image is usually disassembled (or deconstructed) and re-assembled through a system of signifiers that contextualize and historicize it. To give an example, based on a variety of iconographic details, the famous icon of the Sinai *Pantocrator* can be explored in connection with Constantinopolitan portraits of the period in mosaics and coinage, for its indebtedness to classical and Fayum portraiture, or in comparison to contemporary works found in Rome, Cyprus, Thessaloniki etc.[23] Even though its study in these terms is certainly valuable to the art historian and archaeologist, it cannot account for its aesthetic significance and distinctive presence. These are determined by how plastic qualities converge to constitute the figure's physical and mental way of existing in its own nature, in the specific space and time of the image

[21] A.I. Pallas, "Hai Aesthetikai Ideai ton Byzantinon pro tes Haloseos," *Epeteris*, 34 (1965): pp. 313–331. Eugenikos, like Manuel II Paleologus (1350–1425), was part of a new interest in naturalism among Byzantine literati. See also Mango, *Art*, p. 244, #4.

[22] Ibid., p. 321.

[23] Chatzidakis, "An Encaustic Icon of Christ at Sinai."

itself and only there—something that for the historian is (understandably) an anomaly.

Thus when we ask the question "*Who* is this man?" of a well-known icon like the twelfth-century mosaic of Christ from the *Great Deesis* in St. Sophia Istanbul (Figure 3.1), we are asking it of the particular being that stands before us and whose presence the aesthetic object as such constitutes.[24] How that presence comes to be and in what modalities is what we are interested in. What is its nature and how it lives it qua image is the question that we need to ask from the standpoint of *enargeia*, keeping in mind that we are looking for that dimension or movement in the image that brings it to realization.

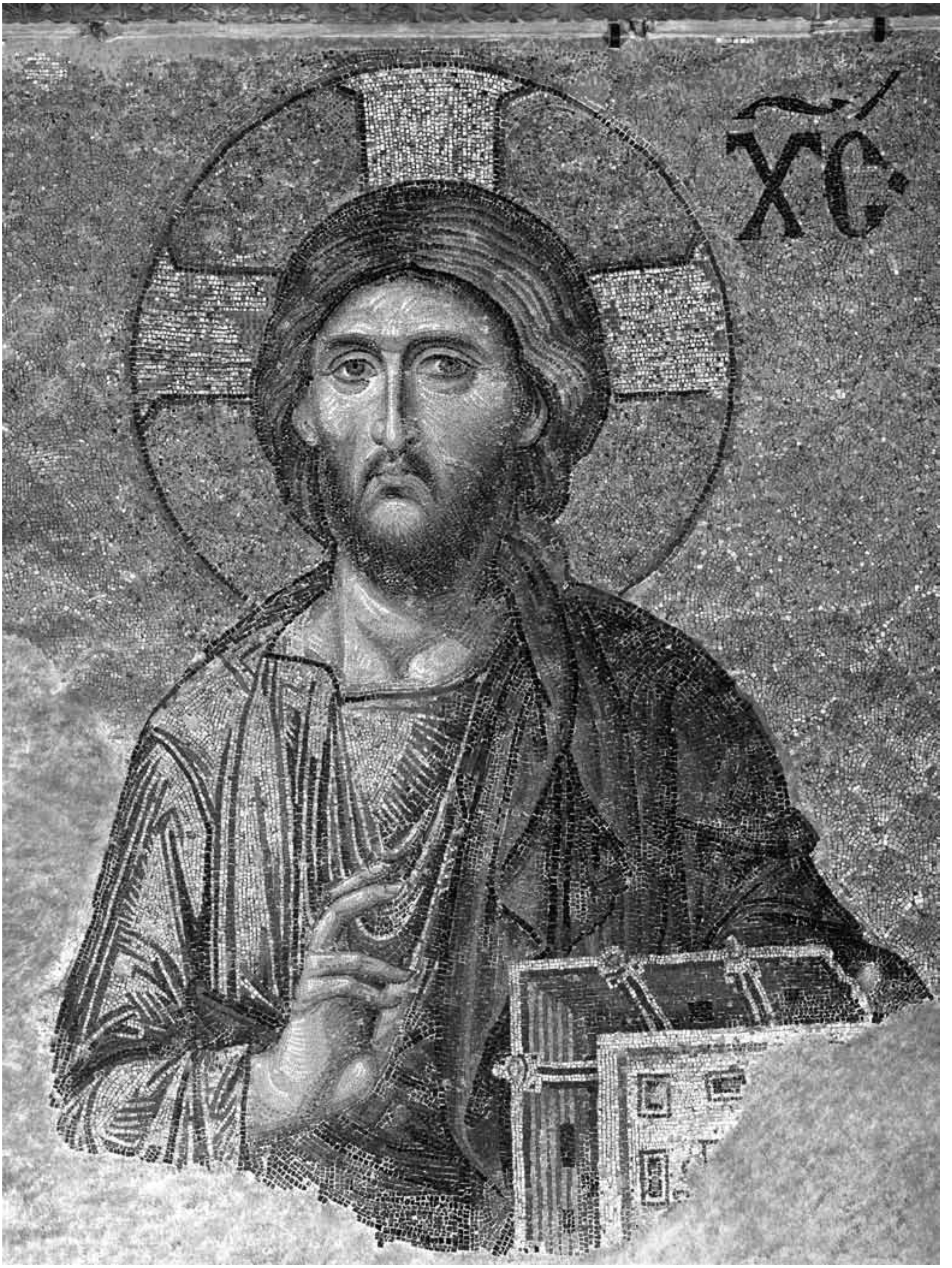
The detail shown here is part of a larger composition that includes the Virgin Mary and St. John the Forerunner. Approaching the mosaic as a field of activity rather than as an object, we look for what transpires inside its space. We want to perceive it from within, from what it posits as its own space by existing in the way(s) that it does. We perceive movement within the composition—something, as we shall see in Chapter 11, that was not unknown to Byzantine viewers (see Psellus' *ekphrasis* on an icon of the Crucifixion below). The figure's extended hand, emerging from its splendid hymation, draws attention to the expressive qualities of his face with which it is subtly aligned. It helps intensify what is already perceived in the face itself. To the austere, watchful and concerned expression, the hand adds the stillness and concentration that is evident in its gesture. This is complemented by the robust physique and lush, sculptured cloak that gives a sense of solidity in contrast to the golden hymation that integrates the figure with the two-dimensional space around it, in an effusion of gold and light.

Though difficult at first to bracket the knowledge of his identity, engagement with the visual object itself gradually replaces the cultural signifier with the aesthetic existent. No considerations of cult, religion or technique are present here because they have been put aside. Do they exist in the background? Yes, but they need not interfere. This shift from signification to vital presence is the reverse of a process that is very popular in the study of Byzantine art today and typically brings to complex and vivid visual objects the passive condition of cultural and ideological construction.[25]

Enargeia is hypostatic. We see a face in its act of *existing* and *actualizing* its austerity, gentleness, authority etc. and conversely we see these "qualities" in their act of *existing* and *actualizing* that particular face. Conventional attributes—the nimbus, wings, gesture of benediction etc.—are absorbed

[24] In Aristotle individuals as such cannot be known through universal propositions (which is why they cannot be defined, *ouk estin horismos*) but may be grasped directly (*gnorizontai*) by the intellect (*noeseos*) or the senses (*aestheseos*). See *Metaphysics*, Z 1036a, *Posterior Analytics*, 83a; *Summa Theologica*, I, 5:5; I, 5:3. For a discussion of this concept in Aquinas, see Gilson, *Christian Philosophy*, pp. 29–45, 357–378.

[25] See for example Dagron, *Décrire*, pp. 73–77. An account of the miraculous composition of the mosaic given to Anthony of Novgorod is also interpreted by Dagron in this narrow sense (as an instance of divine *autoportrait* and induced sublimity).



3.1 *Christ Deesis*, 12th century, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, Turkey

in this movement and lose their symbolic function. In an *enargic* icon, the Archangel Michael would appear diaphanous and ethereal in a way that suggests vigilance and power, his nature fully and actively present in his form. St. John the Forerunner (often depicted with wings), would appear emaciated in a way that suggests the aridity and emptiness of the desert, the intensity of fasting, the tranquil concentration brought by prayer etc. The conventional (hagiographic) use of wings to designate the angel and ascetic respectively would in this case be redundant because every aspect of the image (rather than just the wings) delivers angelic and ascetical being. *Enargic* icons present their subjects not as a collage of signifiers but as beings realizing in their acts of existence the qualities that constitute their distinctive natures.

Thus vivacity in *enargeia* is not a quality of the surface, of the appearance of the image; or conversely of the image *as* appearance or phenomenon. It is not, in other words, what Marion calls an "idol" or "the phenomenality of the saturated phenomenon" behind and through which operates an abstract visibility, a Platonic universal of the image that haunts the intellect to multiple viewings and constant speculation (literally).[26] *Enargeia* is not a spectacle or a denomination for perpetual specularity regulated by an invisible matrix possessed by the image and deployed where its frame exists. It is not a façade behind which, as in a *prosopeion* or mask, we may posit *in absentia*, as Marion suggests, the person or the face that painting supposedly can never reach and which it therefore can show only by fragmentation and dismembering.[27]

Enargeia is that movement in the work of art that constitutes its object as a living being, existing in, through and toward its own nature, presenting its face *de profundis*, from a depth which it possesses and which it offers *gratis* to the viewer. *Enargeia* transforms the image from a flat semblance of world to an aesthetic being in its own right, a *zoon aesthetikon*. It is therefore the fulfillment of art's being, its ontological fruition. This is a moment that commands reverence and, to agree with a part of Marion's analysis, our return to the work. Yet in our case, it is not as lovers of emanations that we return but rather as participants in the lives of beings which art has embodied and transfigured.

In fact, in *enargeia* we attend both to the being of the aesthetic object at hand and to what that object brings to life of its own being, not representationally (as likeness) but in the sense that Heidegger recognizes in Van Gogh's paintings of peasant shoes: "Some particular entity, a pair of shoes, comes in the work *to stand in the light of its being*" (emphasis added).[28] In Heidegger, of course, this epiphany of the painted object is a motion within Being itself, an instance of ontophany—which appears "as a clearing, a lighting" right where the peasant shoes reveal their own being.[29] The difference is important to note since whereas in his view the work of art opens itself to the contemplation of Being

[26] Marion, pp. 68, 70–72.

[27] Ibid., pp. 75–81.

[28] Heidegger, *Poetry*, p. 36. Karsten Harries, *Art Matters: A Critical Commentary on Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art"* (New York, 2009), pp. 96–100.

[29] Heidegger, *Poetry*, p. 53.

in whose presence it arises—or has its moment—in *enargeia*, understood in its Christian modality, the work of art opens itself to Christ in whose person and presence it comes alive aesthetically.

Enargeia resonates with the Christian conception of the human person according to which our nature is evident in the self-determined exercise of our being which always exceeds what we are at any given time, and what we show and know of ourselves. But in a yet deeper sense, which we may borrow from this point in Heidegger's thought and call a literal "*anastasis*" (an up-raising) of being, persons are called by Christ in this life to a resurrection of being where they may stand, in *theosis*, simultaneously in his light and in that of their own finite but transfigured natures. This is why, as we shall show later, this kind of image resonates with spiritual life. Like the deified ascetic who finds in the fullness of her own being both humanity and God, *ascesis* and gift, nature and mystery, it exists by simultaneously positing and transcending the facticity of its own being (a person is never a natural fact). Thus it theologizes by the very act of being what it is. From an Orthodox perspective, this is a form of *logos* which the work both renders transparent and withdraws as the same time. In *enargeia* what shines forth is not a surface but that movement through which a surface becomes possible. In this movement an expressive act takes place in which the reverent viewer—the one who listens or attends to the being at hand—may recognize the work of grace.[30]

Here grace is not used metaphorically. It actually exists as an aesthetic reality. To see this we need to touch on a theological point. In one of his seminal essays on Palamas, the Greek theologian Georgios Mantzaridis shows how the imitation or *mimesis* of Christ is an inimical part of deification. In contrast to Lossky, who sees the *imitatio Christi* as a problematic position of Catholic theology, Mantzaridis places the difference in the eschatological and sacramental dimension that Orthodoxy assigns to the moral and spiritual imitation of the life of Christ.[31] Thus, for Palamas *mimesis* leads to *metoche*, as the former denotes the proximity of God in and through Christ while the latter brings those who strive to become Christ-like closer to what Palamas, quoting Dionysius, calls the "*amimeton mimema*" (inimitable imitation): the unknown God in his inimitable divine essence.[32]

Thus *metoche* completes or fulfills what *mimesis* initiates and *mimesis* therefore is never a mere simulation or projection of likeness. In an aesthetic sense, by positing a thing's lively presence as an expression of the fullness of its being, the work of art becomes plerotic. At the same time, by placing it in the world, in its natural and finite givenness as a sensuous existent, it

30 On the relationship between grace and divine light, see Lossky, *Image*, pp. 45–69.

31 Georgios I. Mantzaridis, *Palamika* (Palamite Studies) (Thessaloniki, 1998), pp. 97–99, 97–148. Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, 1976), p. 215. On the sacraments and deification, see Vladimir Lossky, *The Deification of Man: Saint Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition*, trans. Liadain Sherrard (Crestwood, 1984), pp. 41–60.

32 Mantzaridis, *Palamika*, pp. 111, 109.

becomes kenotic—in Maximus this movement takes the form of a crucifixion (Chapter 9). Thus, where *enargeia* is present, the aesthetic object exists in an eschatological modality, ordaining its "imitation" of a portion of world—"according to the image" (*kat'eikona*)—energically to its "participation" (*koinonia*, *methexis*) in its perfection—"in the likeness" (*kath'omoiosin*). It is in the convergence of these two moments that we may situate aesthetic grace and speak of art's "life-in-Christ" (*en Christo zoe*).

Hesychia, translated literally as stillness or silence, is another important concept.[33] A *hesychast* is one who silences and arrests the passions and trains the senses to wait patiently for God to enter and awaken the heart. The term is associated with the invocation of the name of Jesus in the writings of St. Macarius of Egypt (c. 300–390) and St. John Climacus (c. 570–649).[34] In Climacus, *hesychia* is the subject of an entire chapter where it is defined as a systematic discipline or "science" (*episteme*) that aims at moral and spiritual purity. The ascetic practices vigilance (*nepsis*) in the guarding (*periorismos*, *phylake*) of the senses (*aestheseis*), heart (*kardia*) and intellect (*nous*), and prays unceasingly, in remembrance of Jesus and in the vocal and silent invocation of his name: "*hesychia* is unceasing worship of God and presence before Him. Let the memory of Jesus unite with your breath (*te pnoe*), and you will know the benefits of *hesychia*."[35]

Thus *hesychia* is a type of stillness in which, paradoxically, God motions to the heart and the heart listens and responds. In this form, it is the uninterrupted discipline of Orthodox asceticism from the first centuries of Christian hermetical life in Egypt, Palestine and Syria.[36] The *hesychast* practices detachment or dispassion (*apatheia*) in relation to exterior and interior objects as a result of which she comes to experience things in their own integral being rather than as the agitated and divided constructs of her passions. The concept of reverence or *eusebeia* in Maximus has a *hesychastic* basis.

The relationship between *enargeia* and beauty (*kallos*, *pulchritudo*) is another important matter to consider, given beauty's predominance in theological discussions of art. *Enargeia* describes an act of hypostatic expression that originates inside the art object. Beauty, by contrast, describes the degree to which what happens in the art object agrees with a given concept and thus with its "ideal" form. In its classical and later scholastic definition in Aquinas (*integritas/perfectio*, *debita proportio/consonantia* and *claritas/splendor*)—from

33 For an assessment of the controversies associated with the term *hesychasm* in fourteenth-century Byzantium, its ambiguities and legacy, see John Meyendorff, "Mount Athos in the Fourteenth Century: Spiritual and Intellectual Legacy," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 42 (1988): pp. 157–165. For an overview (in Greek) of the theological and political issues and major personalities, see Venizelos Christophorides, *Oi Hsychastikes Erides Kata Ton IΔ Aiona* (The Hesychastic Controversies of the Fourteenth Century) (Thessaloniki, 1993).

34 Christophorides, pp. 13–15.

35 PG88:1097ABC, 1108B, 1112C.

36 Alexander Golytzin, "*Theophaneia*: Forum on the Jewish Roots of Orthodox Spirituality," and "Christian Mysticism Over Two Millenia," in Lourié and Orlov, pp. xvii–xx; xxi–xxxiii. See also Meyendorff, "Mount Athos in the Fourteenth Century."

where its theological application originates in the West—beauty results from the ordering and comparison of an object to a form that exists outside it as a concept or idea.[37] As such, it makes perception depend on an intellective act rather than on the evidentiary power of the art object itself—as is the case with *enargeia*. Even though this approach is psychologically and epistemologically salient, it is aesthetically problematic because it undermines the autarky of the aesthetic object. Fallacies associated with the subjective aspect of cognition are thus common and have dominated the theory and theology of art, as we shall see in Chapter 5.

This particular aesthetic is Greek in origin. The recognition of the dynamism of the cognitive and creative act is an Aristotelian accomplishment. In Aristotle, a thing excels when it possesses its nature perfectly, or as perfectly as possible.[38] When art opts for perfection, it can actually complete nature by bringing to its subject what it may lack by accident or circumstance: "art partly completes what nature cannot bring to a finish."[39] This brings to art the function of perfecting or idealizing its subject based on the artist's comprehension of what that entails for its nature. What is teleologically structured is intentionally determined. Plotinus repeats this idea in an almost identical formulation. Starting from the forming principles of things (*logoi*)—literally "running back" (*anatrehousin*) to them—the arts "make up what is defective in things" and in so doing make them beautiful (*kallos*).[40]

For Plotinus, who is indebted to the Platonic definition of the concept, a thing is beautiful by participating in the form (*metoche eidous*) of beauty.[41] The form unifies a thing or a picture by bringing all its aspects under a concept (*eis en sunacthentos*).[42] This is a principle that applies to all things which acquire their essence or nature by submitting their material aspects to ideas. Art (*techne*) is understood as the intentional activity that terminates in an object. It imparts form on a thing and makes it beautiful by that act of unification. Fundamentally, it is the transference of someone's idea (*en to ennoesanti*) to a material substance which is transformed in the process.[43] Thus a picture of a thing is beautiful in two ways. First, according to the degree of its participation in the form or idea of its nature and second, according to the degree of its participation in the art or activity by means of which that form was implanted in matter (*meteiche tes technes*).[44]

Another example comes from scholastic aesthetics. Aquinas' conception of being as act is in principle compatible with *enargeia* and an interesting point from where to pursue the application of this concept to a Catholic aesthetics

[37] The full definition of *pulchritudo* in Thomas is found in ST I 39:8; I and in I Sent. 31:2:1. On *consonantia*, *debita proportio* and *commensuratio*, see ST I 5:4.

[38] Phy.246a–246b, 1–5.

[39] Phy.199a, 15–20.

[40] *Ennead* v.8, 1:35–40.

[41] *Ennead* I.6, 2:15–20.

[42] *Ennead* I.6, 2:20–25.

[43] *Ennead* V.8, 1:15–20.

[44] Ibid.

(a task that we cannot pursue here). However, his discussion of beauty does not suggest the evidentiary power of aesthetic form.[45] *Claritas* may seem the most relevant concept but its association with color and brightness (*colorem nitidum*) suggests a superficial quality (as *splendor* it means luster, brilliance) that is principally used by Aquinas as a metaphor for intelligibility.[46] An image whose parts and principles are structurally (*integritas*) and relationally (*debita proportio*) formed according to its essence has *claritas* and therefore beauty.

The order of the definition itself is consistent with the way that the intellect operates. It starts from particulars and moves through plurality (i.e., properties and accidents) to the universal: "the human intellect knows by composition, division and reasoning."[47] Aquinas defines *claritas* in terms of intelligibility and the self-manifesting activity of the agent intellect in an object. The ensuing form functions as a sensuous concept that is probably most evident in the least sensuous aspect of the image: its color (an association that the Byzantines also made, as we shall see). Form is lucid to the extent that its species is clearly outlined and perceptible as such.[48] How lucid form is depends on the intensity or vividness of its colors. *Claritas* in a thing or image is the outcome of two intellective acts: the one that created it and the one that perceives it.

A more interesting point where the Thomist concept of beauty comes close to *enargeia* is the association of perfection with *integritas*. A being must have the exact parts and principles corresponding to its essence if it is to be perfect. An object has perfection to the degree that it is commensurate with its concept (in which its parts and principles are outlined). As in Aristotle, perfection is the completion of a thing, so that nothing of its essential form is missing.[49] This movement toward entelechy is important when considered in aesthetic terms. But rather than remain inside the art object, as an aesthetic reality, in Aquinas it is transferred outside, to an intellective act. Thus the image is now considered from the (critical) standpoint of its adequately fitting or matching its concept and therefore of its being a good or bad representation.

We can illustrate this with an example. Given that the Virgin Mary is pure, meek and humble, any female figure that has these three qualities will match her person or character perfectly. With the concept or type posited externally, the relationship to the object is one of correspondence. Predictably, beauty becomes in this instance a form of truth. The picture is then true to the Virgin or to what the given concept outlines. Because of this abstract, conceptual quality it is easy to isolate beauty according to types (e.g., that of Christ, of

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45 For a discussion of *esse* see Gilson, *Christian*, pp. 29–45, 357–378. The Spanish painter and church censor Francisco Pacheco (1564–1644) is interested in vividness because it can "persuade men to piety and raise them toward God." Charles Harrison, Paul Wood and Jason Gaiger (eds.), *Art in Theory, 1648–1815: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (London, 2000), p. 33.

46 *Claritas* is defined as "brightness of color" or simply brightness in ST I 39:8.

47 ST I 85:5.

48 II. Sent. 13:1:2; I. Sent. 3:1:2.

49 ST I 4.

the Virgin Mary, of the Archangel Michael etc.) and then use it as a formula. In practice, the formula remains constant while the specifics (or accidents) of the individual figure—its age, dress, hairstyle, social status, nationality etc.—vary.

By establishing beauty on the basis of perfection in this sense, it is possible to call beautiful even something that is ugly as long as it matches in all respects the concept of ugliness or the specific type of ugliness it portrays. Thus Aquinas: "an image is said to be beautiful if it perfectly represents even an ugly thing."[50] A perfectly ugly picture of Judas is beautiful with regard to his essence and so his ugliness in that case is aesthetically pleasing etc. Beauty consistently poses the question of a work's matching something or fitting a standard. As such it introduces ideality in the discussion of art, as the state of perfection with regard to a thing's nature that a work achieves by approximation, in a representational act. This has a disorienting effect on aesthetic inquiry as noted by Heidegger who argues that to speak in terms of "eternity" and "immortality" about art is to avoid the precise speech that makes it possible to think about its essentials.[51] *Enargeia*, by contrast, makes it possible for an image to posit its own version of eternity or immortality and to contain the intellective act entirely within its boundaries.

Concerning the Greek word for beauty and its theological use, *kallos* is noticeably absent from the key passages in St. John Damascene's (c. 676–c. 749) major work on images. Damascene explains how images depict their subjects and the role played by line and color in that process but has nothing of substance to say about beauty. Even though the term is used extensively in Byzantine hymnography and *ekphraseis* as an epithet for Christ and the *Theotokos*, it is certainly not the definitive category of Byzantine art criticism.[52] This may reflect the term's association in antiquity with the size (*megethos*) and majesty or grandness (*megethos* in a metaphorical sense, *maiestas*) of pagan deities depicted in sculpture. Dio Chrysostom, for example, has Phidias praise one of his own statues for the "beauty and the grandness of the god" (*kallos e megethos theou*) it portrays, and Plutarch also combines the two terms when he compares a certain statue to the statue of Zeus at Olympia (*to kallos kai to megethos paraplesion*).[53]

For Damascene, *kallos* is a quality assigned exclusively to the first person of the Trinity. The *Logos* Christ is not described as beautiful in his humanity, even when his divine nature is discussed in connection to his depiction.[54] Perhaps the subject is too complicated for Damascene to address in that context. When used with reference to the Father, *kallos* is called "divine"

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50 ST I 39:8.

51 Heidegger, *Poetry*, pp. 79–80.

52 A *kontakion* in the liturgy of the Sunday of Orthodoxy, which commemorates the restoration of images, refers to the Incarnation as the restoration of humanity through the infusion in human flesh of the "divine beauty" (*theio kallei*) of the Christ *Logos*.

53 Zanker, "*Enargeia* in the Ancient Criticism of Poetry."

54 PG94: 1325AB.

and “archetypal” (*theion*, *archetypon kallos*). Following St. Gregory of Nyssa, whose opinion John echoes, it is clearly something that painting cannot convey: “since ‘the divine beauty is not made resplendent (*enaglaizetai*) in a certain external figure (*schemasi*) or fortunate shape (*morphes*) through certain beautiful colors (*euchroias*),’ it is therefore not depicted (*ouk eikonizetai*) while the human form is transferred to tablets by means of colors (*dia chromaton*).”[55] Thus while it is not possible to paint God’s beauty and splendor, it is possible (and admissible) to paint his human form. This is consistent with the view of painting as a duplicating act confined to the physical appearance of a thing—a Platonic notion, at least from a conventional reading of Plato (more on this subject below and in Chapter 12). An image can never render its original and this applies more than anything to God (*ou kata panta eoiken e eikon to prototypon … pantos oratai en autois diafora*).[56]

We turn next to another important term: “tradition” (*paradosis*). In Catholicism, tradition is used in two senses. As sacred tradition, it refers to transmission “in its entirety of the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit.”[57] This is understood in terms of written (outside Scripture) and orally transmitted or unwritten teachings of the divine word as sanctioned by the Church through the Magisterium (the teaching office exercised by the bishops under papal authority or personally by the pope).[58] It is also used in the plural of all ecclesiastical and pious practices sanctioned by the same authority. In this sense, it is the generic term for a variety of historically determined, culture-specific and equally valid customs centered on Church life.[59] Traditionalism may be defined according to these practices (e.g., prayers, ceremonies, liturgical and penitential rites, art) and customs. It refers to the valorization of some such practices and customs as orthodox and the exclusion of others as unorthodox.

For the Orthodox view of tradition we turn to Lossky. In a seminal article, Lossky associates the term with the disclosed and hidden realities of the Son *Logos*. Christ offers himself in the written and oral truths of the faith, in sacramental and liturgical customs and in devotional and ritual objects like icons, censers, reliquaries etc.[60] He is therefore open to all members of the

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55 PG94: 1269BC.

56 PG94: 1337AB.

57 Austin Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (2 vols, Northport, 1996), vol. 1, p. 755 (58.9).

58 Ibid., pp. 755–756 (58.9–10).

59 Thus in *Sacrosanctum concilium* (Vatican II, 4 Dec. 1963): “It means understanding and evaluating all the periods of time and ways of thought in which the one faith of the Church has been expressed in terms of the widely differing human cultures formerly obtaining in the Semitic, Greek and Latin worlds. Such a wide perspective enables us to appreciate how marvelously the Holy Spirit has endowed the people of God with an astonishing fidelity in preserving unchanged the deposit of faith, notwithstanding an immense variety in prayers and rites.” Ibid., p. 158 (13.9).

60 Lossky, *Image*, p. 148.

Church who partake of his presence in acts of vocal and silent communion (sacraments, hymns, icons, gestures, devotions, rites, signs etc.). The words and figures of Scripture subsist eschatologically, bearing Christ in them from all eternity and simultaneously making him available to the faithful of all times according to their individual circumstances.

Lossky's distinction between what is revealed and what it kept hidden in the life of the Church is based, as he explains, on a text by St. Basil of Caesarea (c. 329–c. 379). Basil defines "dogma" (in contradistinction from "kerygma") as "teaching (*didaskalia*) unpublished and secret, that our fathers kept in silence, free from disquiet and curiosity, well knowing that in being silent one safeguards the sacred character of the mysteries."[61] This is an important passage. It immediately leads us to think of icons from a new perspective. Icons are here seen as an explicit and silent form of divine speech. But what they convey in silence is not exhausted by this analogy. For inasmuch as they belong to Christ, they have a life of their own. The same applies to all aspects of Church life and culture. Christ's presence in them is as inexhaustible as it is ultimately unfathomable. And to the extent that they exist in him, they too possess these qualities.

Thus, tradition is the reality in which the Church encounters the mystery of its own existence. It therefore exists in what we may call a horizontal epiphany and a vertical theophany. To convey this difficult but essential notion, Lossky is guided by a text of St. Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35–117): "he who possesses in truth the word of Jesus can hear even its silence (*tes hesychias autou akouein*)."[62] *Hesychia* or silence (in this context) is the timeless and inexhaustible vitality and communicative plenitude of the divine word, of which the human word is only an incomplete and temporal expression. But in order to hear this silence, one must first submit (descend) to its reality. Stillness, quiet and love of God (in Maximus, as we shall see, it is a form of "burial" or *taphe* that gives rise to *eusebeia*) will allow the divine word to be heard and seen (to rise). The ascetical aspects of this notion are not noted by Lossky, but they are readily evident in the way that *hesychia* is used by Ignatius to suggest *how* the person who possesses Christ or in whom Christ is alive comes to perceive what is communicated. Here we can appreciate the spiritual significance and richness of the concept.

Hesychia is also the breath of the Holy Spirit, the condition of seeing all things through Christ, in the free subsistence that he imparts on a sanctified creation. It informs invisibly all aspects of Christian revelation: Scripture, sacraments, liturgy, iconography, the lives of saints etc. Even though it permeates nature, culture and history it is not subject to their contingencies. This freedom Lossky calls "freeness" or *parrhesia*, a term that in its New Testament use (1

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[61] Ibid., p. 145.

[62] Another passage from Basil is quoted in this connection: "There is also a form of silence, namely the obscurity used by the Scripture, which is intended in order to make it difficult to gain understanding of the teachings, for the profit of readers." Ibid., p. 150.

John 2:28, Hebrews 3:6) implies intimacy (*en auto*, *ou oikos esmen*) with Christ or being at home in his presence and life.[63] It is *parrhesia* that gives tradition its profound meaning and mystical life. What transpires in the canonical life of the Church is comprehensible only against a more profound, ineffable reality. This reality envelops it and allows it to be heard, seen and known at any given time beyond itself.[64]

Tradition in this second sense is immersion in this profound and fecund silence. It is the experience of an enhypostasized and synergic divinity in all things Christian, a perpetual baptism in the Holy Spirit. Lossky describes it as the "*unique* mode of receiving," a condition of intimate, radical susceptibility in the human person: "We say specifically *unique* mode and not *uniform* mode, for to Tradition in its pure notion there belongs nothing formal. It does not impose on human consciousness formal guarantees of the truths of faith, but gives access to the discovery of their inner evidence."[65]

He then adds:

> The pure notion of Tradition can then be defined by saying that it is the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church, communicating to each member of the Body of Christ the faculty of hearing, of receiving, of knowing the Truth in the Light which belongs to it, and not according to the natural light of human reason.[66]

This communication posits its object as elliptical and incomplete (*ek merous*) because it allows the intuition of a fuller reality or actuality in what is immanent and transient: "The knowledge *ek merous* will not be suppressed because it was false, but because its role was merely to make us adhere to the fullness which surpasses every human faculty of knowledge."[67] Thus, it is one thing to have full knowledge and another to know in fullness.

In the second case, the Holy Spirit opens what is known of God to its eschatological completion, something that human understanding can experience but not fully grasp: "Any theological doctrine which pretends to be a perfect explanation of the revealed mystery will inevitably appear to be false: by the very fact of pretending to the fullness of knowledge it will set itself in opposition to the fullness in which the Truth is known in part."[68] When later we discuss the relationship between the vision of uncreated light and the theophanic image, this distinction will prove significant. The exemplary,

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63 Ibid., p. 152.

64 A similar notion in St. Diadochus of Photiki (c. 400–c. 486): "The deep waters of faith (*pisteos buthos*) become turbulent when they are rationally explored (*ereunomenos*). Because at that depth faith resembles the waters of Lethe in which all evil is forgotten, it cannot be probed by a curious intelligence (*periergon ennoion*). It is with a simple intellect (*aploteti dianoias*) that we must sail faith's sea, if we wish to reach the harbor of God's will." The translation is mine. St. Diadochus of Photiki, "On Spiritual Knowledge and Descrimination: One Hundred Texts," in Palmer, Sherrard and Ware, vol. 1, pp. 253–296, 251, #22.

65 Lossky, *Image*, p. 152.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid., p. 161. Lossky quotes St. Paul (I Cor 13:12).

68 Ibid., pp. 161–162.

theophanic image is incompatible with formalism and closure. Rather than stand finalized as an instance of historical understanding and iconographic orthodoxy, it must posit its being in perpetual openness. This openness is best exemplified in the way in which the human person posits its enhypostasizing reality (and dignity) thus reminding us once again of the affinities between exemplarity and personhood.

According to Lossky, "the critical spirit of the Church" arises out of this fullness.[69] To view apocryphal or even heterodox sources "in the light of Tradition," is to assume in them the existence of yet undisclosed meanings and therefore to engage them from the standpoint of discovery rather than correction.[70] The idea that insights about color and illumination found in Modernist painting are relevant to the exploration of the theophanic image relies in part (because it is not ecclesial in the sense implied by tradition) on this critical sense. Lossky puts it beautifully:

> The dynamism of Tradition allows of no inertia either in the habitual forms of piety or in the dogmatic expressions that are repeated mechanically like magic recipes of Truth, guaranteed by the authority of the Church. To preserve the 'dogmatic tradition' does not mean to be attached to doctrinal formulas: *to be within Tradition is to keep the living Truth in the Light of the Holy Spirit; or rather, it is to be kept in the Truth by the vivifying power of Tradition*. But this power, like all that comes from the Spirit, preserves by a ceaseless renewing (emphasis added).[71]

Orthodoxy is a condition of vital participation in divine life rather than submission to doctrinal norms and measures. It is the result of an ontological fruition that brings beings to communion with rather than subservience to God. Lossky recognizes the importance of this view of tradition to iconography. Icons arrive aesthetically, in their own terms, to dogmatic truths. They are not cast in the role of a "kind of hieroglyph or sacred rebus, translating dogmas into a language of conventional signs."[72]

Thus liturgy, hymnography and iconography find their origin and expression within a plerotic "margin of silence."[73] Tradition unfolds horizontally and vertically. It is in the vertical dimension that we encounter the mystical life of the Church. This has implications for iconography. In the mystical, vertical sense, an image has depth; it posits a perpetually open horizon out of which and within its own reality its being arises. In the

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69 Ibid., p. 156.

70 Ibid., pp. 157–158, 156 (#27). "Thus the Church, which will have to correct the inevitable alterations of the sacred texts (that certain 'traditionalists' wish to preserve at any price …), will be able at the same time to recognize in some later interpolations … an authentic expression of the revealed Truth. Naturally, authenticity here has meaning quite other than it has in the historical disciplines." Origen leaves open the actual authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews ("God knows the truth"), but accepts its attribution to Paul as "not by chance," conceding to the wisdom of those who preceded him.

71 Ibid., pp. 159–160.

72 Ibid., pp. 162, 167–168.

73 Ibid., p. 151.

historical, anthropological senses, we discern only the horizontal, temporal aspect, the image's engagement with its given world and circumstances—aesthetically, the two-dimensional image (picture). On the surface, some icons may appear as institutional and cultural objects with multiple functions and meanings. But internally they have different lives. They resist the very disclosure they invite and do so aesthetically. Analyses that treat exemplary icons through a historical or cultural lens only, stumble on this fact. By contrast, exemplary icons manifest an open historicity and a trans-cultural resonance. They fascinate because they live aesthetic lives. They have internalized and transformed their own iconicity and with it all the temporal structures that inform it.

This perhaps is why certain icons persist as objects of hermeneutic fascination (if not fixation). As if in a secular act (or cult) of veneration, the hermeneut assumes the position of a hierarch and consecrator of meaning. The historian, anthropologist and semiotician partakes (for the purpose of elucidation and in the detached manner of the scholar) of the very same mechanisms to which she attributes an icon's sanctification (e.g., the semiotics of the icon *autoportrait* in Dagron). Even the self-disclosure (e.g., in Barthes) and dissolution of the author (sacrificed in his case to the *eidos* of photography) assumes theological virtues like repentance, confession, humility and self-negation. It is thus amusing to see the deconstructionist and the traditionalist converge. In placing and confining the image within certain prototypes, which are selected for their purportedly spiritual authenticity, the traditionalist establishes in her own (formalist) terms a ground of engagement, a form of artificial and arbitrary *koinonia*.

In sharp contrast, the mystical life of tradition liberates the Christian image from the restrictions and contingencies that affect representation (and by extension its semiotic construction or deconstruction). It draws attention to its ability to subsist diachronically as an irreducible existent. Exemplarity, in this sense, and always in a Christian context, is Christomorphic. It achieves an intimacy (*parrhesia*) with Christ's being. Like Christ, it subsists both mystically, within the "deeper" (vertical) ground of the Trinity, and epiphanically, in the emerging (horizontal) realities of human belief and practice. This is the sense, as we have mentioned earlier, that its being is the aesthetic equivalent of an *acheiropoietos*. It exists and avails itself to others spontaneously (rather than programmatically through pre-established hermeneutic structures), mystically (in bringing persons and things to a state of ontological holiness or sanctified existence) and personally (in its enunciating presence).

We turn next to person or "*prosopon*." Greek usage since antiquity confines it to the human countenance, including its simulated form in a theatre mask. The Christian *prosopon* is a *hypostasis*, the Patristic term identified with Aristotle's "second *ousia*."[74] *Ousia* or *hypostasis* was termed "*prosopon*" by

[74] Lossky, *Mystical*, pp. 50–53.

St. Gregory Nazianzen (c. 330–c. 389) and St. Basil. Damascene defines it as an individual being "that subsists by itself and which has not its being in another."[75] Irreducible to abstract formulations of its nature, a *prosopon* is ontologically disposed to determine itself in communion with God. It exists dynamically in that relationship, at the center of an economy of divine grace, and is the model for the perfection (*teleiosis*) of all creation.[76] A *prosopon* is the human being that is liberated to the degree possible from sin—ideally, then, the saint. By sin in this context we should understand the life of self-isolation and self-love (*philautia*). In Maximian anthropology, sin constricts, depletes and distorts human existence and all things affected by human action.

Lossky explains that a *prosopon* "is distinct from his own nature … someone who goes beyond his nature while still containing it, who makes it exist as a human nature by this overstepping and yet does not exist in himself beyond the nature which he 'enhypostasizes' and which he constantly exceeds."[77] To be a person in this view, is to defy circumscription and exist or realize one's own nature charismatically:

> The creature, who is both 'physical' and 'hypostatic' at the same time, is called to realize his unity of nature as well as his true personal diversity by going in grace beyond the individual limits which divide nature and tend to reduce persons to the level of the closed being of particular substances.[78]

For Lossky, the question of what really constitutes a person ontologically cannot be answered. It would require what is virtually impossible: containing this enhypostasizing activity into an essence in order to represent it conceptually. Ultimately what constitutes at the deepest level a person is a (metaontological) question about the limits of ontology. If we take this notion a step further, the liminal moment is one in which *hypostasis* at once displaces and posits *ousia*, and where it becomes necessary perhaps to theologize rather than ontologize being.

What is the exact relationship between person and exemplarity in the art object? It is one of analogy. The exemplary aesthetic object subsists beyond its physical (as thing) and representational (as picture, symbol, sign etc.) designation. It enunciates its own unique and ineffable existence through and beyond its physical and aesthetic being. In these acts (or

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75 Ibid. Lossky, *Image*, p. 114.

76 Lossky, *Image*, pp. 186, 192–193, 120–121. For the experience of *hypostasis/prosopon* in contemporary *hesychasm* see, Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov), *We Shall See Him As He Is*, trans. Rosemary Edmonds (Platina, 2006), pp. 196–210. The human person is a "*prosopon-hypostasis*" and this modality is then extended to all creation that does not anymore exist impersonally (*a-prosopa*). See also Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov), *Opsometha ton Theon Kathos Esti*, trans. Hieromonk Zacharia (Essex, 1996), pp. 303–332.

77 Aquinas and Gilson also recognize this hypostatic (and enhypostasizing) dimension in the human person. Lossky, *Image*, p. 120.

78 Lossky concludes that "the problem of the human person … is a question of metaontology, only God can know …." Ibid., pp. 121–123.

moments), it reaches a level of personal subsistence. It exists personally not because it realizes the intentions of a person (i.e., the artist) but rather because it is engaged in its own expressive act. What is personal about it is not a trace or mark left there by the artist. It is the work's own way of communicating what it is through its act of existence. Ingrained in that act and thus inextricable is the presence of the artist. On this basis, we may draw a distinction between the presence of deep subjectivity in art and that of conventional subjectivity that ties the work teleologically to the intentions of its maker.

The last term to consider is *eikon*. It is not an exaggeration to say that its meaning has been shaped by Platonic philosophy and not in a positive sense. Plato allows some images to be better than others based on verisimilitude and their degree of participation in intellectual principles. These principles establish their correctness or *orthotes* (e.g., symmetry, proportion etc., *Laws* 668ab).

The term is the perfect tense (*eoika*) of the Greek verb *eiko* ("to be like"). This "grammatical detail" is "significant," according to Daniel Sahas, "because it suggests that likeness is an already accomplished fact."[79] In archaic and classical Greek, the term means not only to seem like something but also to *be* like it in a fitting or appropriate sense. An example would be a daughter's being like her mother—the comparison implying two beings that share a common trait rather than one that simulates the other. The distinction is important because it suggests that an *eikon* does not aspire to similitude; it has already achieved it in a *sui generis* way. This is the very opposite of what Plato suggests. It is not in this regard a mimetic object that posits itself as a simulacrum.

Plato frequently uses the term in a generic sense to mean any kind of representation or form produced by art, including that of music (*eikona mousike*), which may or may not be correct (*orthe*) and good (*eu*) (*Laws* 669ab). All arts create images or species of *mimesis* which are called representations or portraits (*apeikasiai*) (668bc). It is safe to say that for Plato the aesthetic meaning of the term is invariably one of representation. *Apeikasia* is the representational dimension of an image which exists in that capacity in relation to an actual object and to a set of intellectual principles. An *eikon* in this case is doubly dependent: first on a thing and second on a standard. It is this etymology that probably influenced Greek Christian thought about images especially in the context of Iconoclasm.[80] Yet, there is also a different dimension to Plato that through Plotinus and Philo of Alexandria (20 B.C.–50 A.D.) found its way to the Greek Fathers.

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79 Sahas, p. 17. *Eoiken* is used by Sophocles in the sense of both appropriate and likely (e.g., in inferring intention from one's behavior). Jocasta: "one should (*eike*) live as life comes." Oedipus: "it seems (*eoiken*) that this man is trying to delay us." See Constantine A. Trypanis, *The Penguin Book of Greek Verse* (London, 1971), pp. 214, 223.

80 Gerhart B. Ladner, "The Concept of the Image in the Greek Fathers and the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 7 (1953): pp. 1–34.

Considered as a species of *eidolon*, an *eikon* is a "likeness" that has more reality than a *phantasma* which is defined as "semblance" (*Sophist* 236ab).[81] In *Republic* (509e, 598e–599a), images and their corresponding form of cognition (*eikasia*) are placed at the lowest segment of the Divided Line and described as "shadows" and "reflections" (*skias* and *phantasmata* respectively). Plato also uses the term to mean copy and at times he treats it as a kind of *phantasma*. In the *Timaeus*, for example, *eikon* is used to refer to the blurry, dream-like images (*phantasma*) that we see when we have just awakened from sleep. These are so unreal and deprived of substance that they exist on the verge of non-existence (*meden einai*), trying to latch on to real beings (52c). Thus, the near non-being of an *eikon* is presented as the cause of its derivative nature; an image in this sense has depravity in its very being and dependency in its relationship to other beings. But this dependency implies a movement in the image toward realization or completion, from the picture to its original (or to any object similar to its original). Ontologically, then, images are defined by their gravitation toward the real (physical) beings they simulate and which they can never reach. They are in that sense failed beings.

But they are also necessary beings. There is no world (and no thought) without images; no such thing as an aniconic reality. In the *Timaeus* (29b, 30bc), it is in the nature of reality to point to an original and to itself as its copy: "it is wholly necessary that this cosmos be the image of something" (*eikona tinos einai*). The divine creator and architect (*poieten*, *demiourgos*, *tektainomenos*) fixes his gaze on the eternal good (*aidion*, *agathon*) and uses it as a model for creation (*paradeigma*) (28c–29a). As it unfolds into images of images, the original model remains intact. It is clear that for Plato, to avoid being a "likeness" a thing must be somehow aligned with the original model rather than with its emanations.

There is, however, a point that is of great interest to us because it suggests a different type of image. We are told in *Timaeus* 29bc that there exist superior images (or statements) that abide by the *logoi* of things (*prosekei logois*) and are thus in possession of their originals. Inferior images, by contrast, abide by the semblances (*ana logon*) of things (29bc). An *eikon* in this second sense is an analog or simulacrum. It is bound to a perpetual state of intimation (allusion); it is a shadow and semblance of something other than itself. By contrast, an *eikon* in the first sense seems engaged in a movement of self-perfection, having somehow embodied or internalized the *logoi* of things. If I am reading Plato correctly, he sounds a lot like Maximus.

There is a passage of similar interest in Plotinus. Anyone that "despises or dishonors" (*atimazei*) the arts, he says,

> must know that the arts do not simply imitate what they see, but they run back up to the forming principles (*logoi*) from which nature derives; then also that they do a great deal by themselves (*polla par'auton poiousi*), and since they possess beauty (*kallos*), they make up what is defective (*elleipei*) in things.

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[81] F.E. Peters, *Greek Philosophical Terms: A Historical Lexicon* (New York, 1967), pp. 45–46.

He then offers this example: "For Pheidias too did not make his Zeus from any model perceived by the senses (*ouden aestheton*), but understood *what Zeus would look like if he wanted to make himself visible* (emphasis added)."[82]

Although intelligible, *logoi* should not be understood theoretically or abstractly but as given in the concrete act of a thing's existence—in this case of the sculpted Zeus. *Logos* is the living reality of a thing, not its explanation or concept. Moreover, this act is an act of self-manifestation. The art object (statue) embodies it because it has been made dynamically, vividly through *logoi* rather than through *aestheseis* or superficial impressions. Pheidias' statue does not represent Zeus (and posit him as a model). It brings him to life by its own means (its own act of existence)—exactly the sense of *enargeia*.[83] This is why Plotinus explains that the arts have an inherent (*par'auton*) dynamic by means of which they bring the things they depict to perfection. Interestingly, *kallos* is the appearance of that act of completion in the work of art. In the case of the Zeus statue, it designates the act of theophany itself.

Finally, in Philo (20 B.C.–50 A.D.) the concept of God's *Logos* is called an "image of God" (*eikon Theou*).[84] It underwrites all creation and suggests a cosmos that is not only rational but also the locus of a perpetual theophany. Divine grace brings to the created cosmos the reconciliation of image and imaged. In St. Athanasius (c. 293–373) and in the Areopagite it is possible for an *eikon* to come to an almost complete identity with its original.[85] Following classical epigrammatic conventions and with Christ's divinity in mind, Athanasius explains how an *eikon* can actually realize its object so persuasively that the two will appear indistinguishable: "The image might well say: 'I and the emperor are one,' 'I am in him and he is in me'."[86] The analogy dismisses verisimilitude and instead posits the image as a perfect likeness of its object and as a distinct being that is vitally present in its form.

Something similar is suggested in an example given by Dionysius in *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*:

> … in sensible images (*aestheton eikonon*), if the painter (*grapheus*) looks without interruption (*aklinos*) at the archetypal form, neither distracted (*anthelkomenos*) by any other visible thing nor splitting his attention (*merizomenos*) toward anything else, then he will, so to speak, duplicate (*diplasiasei*) the person painted

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[82] *Ouden aestheton* in this context suggests superficial perception rather than the absence of sensuous experience. Plotinus, *Ennead V*, trans. A.H. Armstrong, Loeb Classical Library (Boston, 1984), p. 240 (v.8.1:35–41).

[83] It is the animated, active intellect of the gods that accounts for the intensity of their presence (*nous energon en autois*). Pheidias' statue creates that presence or exists as an instance of it. v.8.3:20–25.

[84] Ladner, "The Concept of the Image in the Greek Fathers."

[85] Ibid.

[86] Athanasius is referring to John 10:30, 14:10. Ibid.

and will show (*deixei*) the true in the similitude (*to alethes en to homoiomati*), the archetype in the image (*eikoni*), the one in the other (*hekateron en hekatero*) except for their different essences [or natures] (*ousias*).[87]

Two things are important to point out in connection with this passage. The first is the total immersion of the painter in what is being painted. Synergy and fusion with its subject accompany the making of this special type of image from start to finish. The second is the fact that the picture makes the subject subsist *inside* the picture. It exists pictorially as a picture-being that is ontologically distinct from the person the painting depicts. We are thus dealing with two beings: one is the subject that is being painted and the other is the painted subject. The one has natural reality (a person). The other has aesthetic reality (a picture). This is the nature (*ousia*) with respect to which they differ. Hypostatically, however, they are the same. One could mistake the one for the other.

This distinction is relevant to *enargeia* and is aesthetically significant (we shall discuss a similar passage in Diadochus of Photiki below). It is also common in Chinese art critical treatises which repeatedly emphasize the difference between the replication of reality by an image and the presence in it in aesthetic form of the phenomena that constitute it. Thus the landscape painter Ching Hao (c. 870–c. 930) said: "[A picture that attains] likeness achieves the physical form but leaves out the life breath of the subject, while in [a picture that attains] truth the life breath and inner qualities of the subject are fully present."[88]

It is fitting to conclude with an example from Orthodox hymnography that associates *eikon* with a similar form of liveliness. The magnificent sixth-century *cherubikon* or cherubic *troparion* that is included in the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom uses the verb *eikonizein* (to mold something into form). As human and angelic hosts unite in prayer, the faithful come to "iconize" the Cherubim. *Eikonizein* in this context is to take on the qualities of another and realize them in one's way or act of existence. To iconize the Cherubim is to assume or embody their form, to give them a tangible presence, rather than to reflect or replicate them. It is also a reflexive act that incorporates those to whom the *troparion* is addressed in the act of chanting itself. To sing the *troparion*'s words and give them a voice is to exist in that act (and moment) as human cherubim (angels on earth). Thus, the chanter's being a picture of the cherubim is inseparable from the chanting act itself. It *is* that act and what *it* (the act) makes present. As long as the chanting lasts, chanter, chant and cherubim are indistinguishable. The *eikon* is in time, the persons chanting are in eternity.

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[87] PG3: 473C. The translation is Ladner's. Ibid. Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works* (Classics in Western Spirituality), trans. and ed. Paul Rorem (Mahwah, 1987), pp. 225–226.

[88] Wen C. Fong, "Of Nature and Art: Monumental Landscape," in Brown and Hutton, pp. 278–288.

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PART II

THEOLOGY AND ART

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The Orthodox Icon and Modernism

Modernism names a variety of early twentieth-century developments in European and American art. Anti-establishment and often anti-clerical and fascinated by secular utopias, it rejected academicism and long-standing artistic and cultural conventions. It overturned normative perceptions of reality and representation, and idealized the arts and crafts of Asia, the Pacific and Africa. Artists (e.g., Salvador Dali, Georges Rouault, Emil Nolde) who took an interest in religious art, saw in the iconography of Christ's life and Passion powerful metaphors for the expression of intense existential and psychical experiences.

In Russia, avant-gardes turned to the Russian folk icon and occasionally to classical Orthodox iconography to find indigenous prototypes of the art they envisioned. Their interest in icons was defined in that context. An experimental object, the icon was viewed as "spiritual" only because of its expressive character and simple (primitive) composition. Russian artists showed a deeper appreciation for the aesthetic particularity of the icon than did their European colleagues but like them, they understood its spirituality in arcane, theosophical terms.

In this chapter, we begin a critical examination of the relationship between the Orthodox icon and Modernism that will conclude in Chapter 14. The avant-garde rediscovery of the icon in Russia was eclectic and highlighted those aesthetic qualities that agreed with the type of abstraction these artists embraced. In most instances, abstraction was used to create a purely plastic, non-representational or non-objective "object" that would function as a symbol or analog of emotional and speculative realities. This object was part aesthetic and part significational. For the most part, abstraction was conceptually driven. Purely aesthetic (plastic) abstraction, by contrast, is *hypostatic* in nature and brings its objects to a condition of vivid existence and self-realization.

Contemporary philosophical and theological critiques of Modernism have relied mainly on conceptual abstraction which they associate with sublimity or nihilism. They are influenced by what Modernists wrote about their art and by the works themselves viewed from that perspective. For Jean-François

Lyotard, for example, Modernism is defined by the "withdrawal of the real" from representation and a deep "nostalgia for presence."[1] Thus the Modernist work is dominated by intuitions of sublimity. The image alludes to the existence (somewhere) of an object whose greatness it cannot encompass: "it is in the aesthetic of the sublime that modern art (including literature) finds its impetus and the logic of the avant-gardes finds its axioms."[2]

It is a Kantian view of noumenal realities that always lurk undetected behind their phenomenal forms: "The avant-gardes … devote themselves to making an allusion to the unpresentable by means of visible presentations."[3] As the gap between form and transcendence grows, Modernism, according to Lyotard, becomes more radical. Postmodernism (its ground and culmination) "puts forth the unpresentable in presentation itself" and "denies itself the solace of good forms."[4] In Modernism, art becomes speculative: "it must bear witness to the indeterminate."[5] The sublime is experienced as privation and emptiness of form. The work of art has no truth to show. It is a broken being without a life of its own that constantly defers its existence beyond itself. It therefore becomes the site of intense conceptual and emotional activity—the very opposite of what Orthodox ontology implies for the art object, as we shall see.[6]

"Intensity is associated with an ontological dislocation. The art object no longer bends itself to models, but tries to represent the fact that there is an unrepresentable."[7] It gives evidence of something that does not exist and cannot exist aesthetically: "The avant-gardist attempt inscribes the occurrence of a sensory now as what cannot be presented and which remains to be presented in the decline of great representational painting."[8] There are affinities with Ch'an art in positing a phenomenal object that withdraws its (objective) being the very moment one perceives it. Lyotard interprets Modernism as a form of aesthetic iconoclasm. This attempt to purge art of objectivity (immanence) is perfected in Postmodernism (which is therefore, from a Hegelian standpoint, its ground). The only way to undo objectivity is to place the plastic object in a perpetual state of self-negation or self-displacement.[9] Non-art is art's way to its true (false) being. The art object becomes the site of speculative and rhetorical activities about art; it is forcibly theorized.[10]

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1 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, 1989), pp. 77–79, 81–82.

2 The imagination cannot find a physical, sensible analog for its concepts. Ibid., pp. 79, 78, 77. See also Jean-François Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," in Andrew Benjamin (ed.), *The Lyotard Reader* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 196–211.

3 Lyotard, *The Postmodern*, p. 78.

4 Ibid., p. 81.

5 Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," p. 207.

6 The reference is to Edmund Burke's 1757 treatise *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Ibid., p. 204.

7 Ibid., p. 206.

8 Ibid., p. 208.

9 Lyotard, "The Postmodern," pp. 81–82.

10 Ibid.

This is consistent with how some Modernists explained their work. The founding figure of Suprematism, Kasimir Malevich (1878–1935), for example, argued that "non-objectivity" was the sole means for communicating feeling, the "fullest possible expression" of which was the paramount purpose of art.[11] To succeed in that regard, art "wants to have nothing further to do with the object, as such, and believes that it can exist, in and for itself, without 'things'."[12] The adaptation of plain geometric forms and color as alternatives to objectivity was based on the belief that "the visual phenomena of the objective world are, in themselves, meaningless," and their occasional inclusion valid only to the extent that it served the communication of feeling.[13] Of his painting *Black Square* (1913) Malevich characteristically wrote this formula: "The square=feeling, the white field=the void beyond the feeling."[14] The public's negative reaction to the piece was due to its failure to "grasp the evident fact that feeling had here assumed external form."[15] The painting translated "painterly essence" into "painterly sensation"[16] Free from external references and associations, the Suprematist work existed as a pure aesthetic object, and in a state of absolute rest or "non-existence," similar to that which God assumes at the end of creation.[17]

Eventually, even that precarious aesthetic object had to be abandoned. Thus by 1951, it was already evident that Modernism was becoming an establishment art. New York School painter and Abstract Expressionism theoretician Robert Motherwell (1915–1991) wrote:

> in 'finishing' a picture they [young French painters] assume traditional criteria to a much greater degree than we do. They have a real 'finish' in that the picture is a real object, a beautifully made object. We are involved in 'process' and what is a 'finished' object is not so certain.[18]

This was also the view of art critic Harold Rosenberg (1906–1978) in 1952:

> At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act—rather than as a space in which to reproduce,

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11 Herschel B. Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley, 1968), p. 341.

12 Ibid., p. 343.

13 Ibid., p. 341.

14 Ibid., p. 343. See also Nicoletta Misler and John E. Bowlt, "The 'New Barbarians'," in Deborah Horowitz (ed.), *Origins of the Russian Avant-Garde* (New York, 2003), pp. 26–45.

15 Ibid.

16 Troels Andersen (ed.), *K.S. Malevich, Essays on Art 1915–1933*, trans. Xenia Glowacki-Prus and Arnold McMillin (2 vols, London, 1968), vol. 2, pp. 22–27. See Malevich's essays "An Analysis of New and Imitative Art (Paul Cezanne)" and "New Art and Imitative Art (Picasso, Braque)" where works by these artists are examined; vol. 2, pp. 19–29, 31–55.

17 "God is rest; rest is perfection; everything has been achieved; the building of worlds is completed and movement is established in eternity." See Andersen, vol. 1, pp. 214–215, 124.

18 Willem de Kooning, speaking in the same forum: "They have a particular something that makes them look like a 'finished' painting. They have a touch which I am glad not to have." Chipp, pp. 564–565.

re-design, analyze, or 'express' an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event.[19]

The image was now a stage for enacting the work of art or art itself (as concept, theory, ideology etc.).

The open process made all kinds of interventions possible. An act implies an actor and the role typically goes to the artist. As the process now stands open and its product deferred, it becomes possible to posit multiple works. These works are not things (objects) that stand on their own but stages or moments in an unfolding totality that eludes representation. Like speech acts, they follow and precede other speech acts and point to their speaker(s). Subsumed in this process (and the acts that constitute it), the art object is impossible to extricate. It cannot stand on its own, posit and contain its own reality and come in this sense to a resting point. Since it cannot take charge of its own being, its identity will have to be designated from outside by a discerning voice (or text). Thus speech (and any given grammar that regulates or dictates it) takes over experience; the aesthetic becomes rhetorical.

Rhetoric has had a long association with the painted image. The ancient Greek view of painting in which words and pictures were seen as equally powerful expressive acts, comes to mind and challenges these views. The Greek lyric poet Simonides of Ceos (566–468 B.C.) famously described painting as silent poetry and poetry as painting (*zographian*) that speaks (*lalousan*).[20] This did not mean that the two were equal. Poetry has the ability to create images which painting cannot match. But painting is not dependent on this act. It has its own rhetoric which poetry cannot replicate, a voice that the image delivers on its own. Despite giving the spoken word an advantage, Simonides does not suggest an equivalence of word and picture. He simply says that painting can bring things to a state of enunciation that is uniquely its own. Thus, the inscriptions that were added (in funerary *stelae*) were meant to make an image say, what it could not (or would not) say on its own, and do so with the vivacity the living demanded of the deceased (as we can see in the Fayum portraits). Speaking through the inserted inscription, the letters came to life as the viewer read the words.[21]

There is a streak in Modernism that deprives the work of art of its own rhetoric, intentionality and life. In this respect, Lyotard is right. But

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19 Ibid., 569.

20 See Plutarch, *De gloria Atheniensium*, 3, cited in H.S. Thayer. Thayer links the two words, *zographian* and *lalousa*, on the basis of the liveliness implied in both. Simonides is reputed to have invented mnemonics, a technique of associating specific images and locations with words and verbal descriptions. Socrates also demonstrates an elaborate description (*eikon*) of the soul composed in words *(logos*). H.S. Thayer, "Plato's Quarrel with Poetry: Simonides," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 36/1 (Jan.–Mar. 1975): pp. 3–26. For an exploration of the visual and performative (*elenctic*) qualities of archaic verse see C.A. Tsakiridou, "Her Voiceless Voice: Reviewing Sappho's Poetics," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 8/3 (December 2003): pp. 95–107.

21 Jesper Svenbro, *Phrasikleia: An Anthropology of Reading in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Ithaca, 1993), pp. 8–63.

Modernism is not uniform on this matter. Artists like Picasso gave the work of art a voice to which even they were not privy. As in Greek antiquity, for Picasso the work speaks as *it* pleases and no one can speak *for* it. The Orthodox and Byzantine approach to the image is fundamentally Greek in this sense. An example is the *acheiropoietai* and miraculous icons. Animated and efficacious, these images interact with the faithful. They behave like persons by stating their needs, perspire (e.g., milk), reveal secrets, undertake journeys, and through reproduction become perpetual points of contact with the healing and protective energies of saints' relics.[22] They are inserted in liturgical acts where they become the passive recipients of hymns of praise and veneration. They are decorated and incensed and participate in processions as surrogates of the divine and holy persons that they portray. Emerging from this tradition, the icon appealed to Russian Modernists because in addition to its abstract qualities, it had a life outside the realm of art and speculation. It was an object in which the Russian people had centuries of psychic investment. The folk icon in particular was free of ecclesiastical and institutional influences. It was imaginative and unpredictable.

To appreciate better the Modernist interest in the icon (particularly in Russia), it is important to compare briefly Catholic and Orthodox iconography. There is evidence of mutual influence in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries during the Crusades and later after the Reformation when both Russian and Greek iconography borrowed Latin themes, styles and motifs.[23] Leonid Ouspensky (1902–1987) discusses this period in Russia: "carried away by Western novelties, educated society accepted the substitution of the Orthodox icon by an imitation of the Roman Catholic image." Russian avant-garde paintings influenced by icons contain elements from both Orthodox and Catholic piety.[24]

From the end of the high Middle Ages, when the influence of Byzantine models declined, Catholic iconography was characterized by anatomical detail, perspective and naturalistic rendering of the human figure and natural world.[25] Despite its stylistic pluralism (e.g., Gothic, Baroque, Mannerism etc.), the art of Catholicism is doctrinally driven. Concepts like beauty and splendor are meant to suggest theological truths rather than aesthetic facts. Since the Late Middle Ages, Greco-Roman inspired sculpture and architecture, indebted to classical naturalism and Hellenistic monumentality, is the preferred way to express the temporal and spiritual authority of the

22 Annemarie Weyl Carr, "Icons and the Object of Pilgrimage in Middle Byzantine Constantinople," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 56 (2002): pp. 75–92.

23 Leonid Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon* (2 vols, Crestwood, 1992), vol. 1, pp. 441–461, 436, 450.

24 Spira, p. 130.

25 The influence of Byzantine iconography on Italian and Northern European painting in the post-Crusade period and all through the seventeenth century is discussed in Maryan W. Ainsworth, "'*À la façon grècque*': The Encounter of Northern Renaissance Artists with Byzantine Icons," in Evans, pp. 545–593.

Church. Attempts to modernize Church art following Vatican II (1962–1965) affected most dramatically works in that style.

The Orthodox icon owes its distinctive appearance to a number of qualities. They include: a gilded or gold background, inverted and psychological perspective, frontal depiction of figures and objects, emphasis on facial expression, extroverted scenes and even illumination. Illusionism, anatomical details and chiaroscuro are absent. Modernism had little impact on Orthodox iconography even though it was the first Western movement to draw attention in a positive way to its unusual qualities e.g., its luminance, rhythmic composition, stark expressivity etc.[26] There have been attempts subsequently to define and defend the icon as a Modernist prototype. The icon-like qualities of the figure impressed on the Shroud of Turin have been compared to those of Expressionist paintings.[27] Greek scholars, eager to align Orthodox iconography with contemporary art, have made similar observations.[28]

These and similar comparisons tend to be superficial because they are either too general or too uncritical of Modernism.[29] At the heart of the Modernist venture is a quest for cultural and psychic archetypes.[30] But it cannot have confidence (or faith) in its findings. Having "lost a fixed historical reference," it seeks to ground itself in something ideal and transcendent. Avant-garde interest in the Russian folk icon or *lubok* is a perfect example.[31] Many Russian avant-gardes painted icons and studied them but their ideas did not find aesthetic realization in them. Lyotard is right to suggest that totality both fascinates and eludes Modernism and explains its Romantic nature. As Jürgen Habermas has written: "The avant-garde understands itself as invading unknown territory, exposing itself to the dangers of sudden, of shocking encounters, conquering an as yet unoccupied future. The avant-garde must find a direction in a landscape into which no one seems to have yet ventured."[32]

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26 Henry Maguire, "Truth and Convention in Byzantine Descriptions of Works of Art," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 28 (1974): pp. 111–140. Kenneth D. Lindsay and Peter Vergo (eds.), *Wassily Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art (1901–1921)* (2 vols, Boston, 1982), vol. 1, p. 217. Gabi La Cava, "The Expressionist Animal Painter Franz Marc," *CSA Discovery Guides* (April 2004), pp. 5–6, http://www.csa.com/discoveryguides/discoveryguides-main.php.

27 Gino Moretto, *The Shroud: A Guide*, trans. Alan Neame (New York, 1999), p. 11.

28 K. Kalokyris, *H Zographike tes Orthodoxias* (The Painting of Orthodoxy) (Thessaloniki, 1972), pp. 132–134. Eleuterio Fortino, "The Role and Importance of Icons: A Roman Catholic Perspective," in Gennadios Limouris (ed.), *Icons, Windows on Eternity: Theology and Spirituality in Colour* (Geneva, 1990).

29 The pseudo-mysticism of Nolde and especially Kandinsky in his essay "On the Spiritual in Art," are good examples. Chipp, pp. 146–147. Lindsay and Vergo, vol. 1, pp. 120–219. Mark C. Taylor, *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion* (Chicago, 1992), pp. 50–95.

30 Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity versus Postmodernity," *New German Critique*, 22 (Winter 1981): pp. 3–17. This essay was originally delivered when Habermas was awarded the Theodor W. Adorno prize in Frankfurt (September 1980).

31 Ibid., p. 4.

32 Ibid.

Thus, Western artists embraced African and Polynesian art and popular entertainment such as the circus, the side-show etc. shunned by European society. In Russia the *lubok* served a similar function.[33] Rather than venture entirely outside normative forms—as happened in the more radical (and according to Peter Bürger dangerous) aspects of Modernist exploration—the Russian Modernists turned inward, to these indigenous woodblock prints which had as their subject saints, satire, legends, everyday life etc.[34] Religious *lubki* first appeared in the seventeenth century. They were based on iconographic models and were made for pilgrims who could not afford icons. Gradually they developed their own aesthetic (an amalgam of the popular imagination and the canons of classical iconography) and combined religious stories with Russian and Asian (e.g., Indian) folk tales, symbolism and on occasion fantasy landscapes that recall the inverted and floating figures of Chagall's paintings.[35]

In contrast to European academic art, *lubki* were naïve and native. They bore witness to Russia's Eastern, Asiatic identity, and the creative spirit of its people. Circulating in print, in contrast with the handpainted icon, they fit (and foreshadowed) the Modernist ideal of mass-produced art.[36] Once translated in the avant-garde vernacular, they could become an integral part of the path to progress and socialism. The fact that they were also a religious object was an additional attraction. Artists could implant in them personal notions of spirituality and transcendence and exploit their folkloric and mythical aspects as suited the sensibility of the time.

Thus, when Malevich rediscovered Russia's Orthodox heritage, he found in tradition an affirmation of his own spiritual vision. It was like a theatrical grand entrance into a magical world and an occasion for the artist to expand his creativity. In 1920 he wrote:

> … now I have returned or rather I have entered the religious World. I do not know why this has happened. I visit churches, look at the saints, and the whole active spiritual world; I see in myself and, perhaps, in the world, that the time for a new religion has come.[37]

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[33] Ibid., p. 5. See also David Crowley, "National Modernisms," in Christopher Wilk (ed.), *Modernism: Designing a New World 1914–1939* (London, 2006), pp. 340–373.

[34] Habermas, "Modernity versus Postmodernity," p. 4. Peter Bürger's response to Habermas, "The Significance of the Avant-Garde for Contemporary Aesthetics: A Reply to Jürgen Habermas," *New German Critique*, 22 (1981): pp. 19–22.

[35] E.g., in a *lubok* titled "The Pure Soul." On *lubok* composition, Boguslawski notes: "From icon painting the *lubok* inherited the tradition of making the most important figures disproportionately large in relation to the others, using no aerial or mathematical perspective but rather a perspective based on multiple points of view, and called, for the lack of a better word, inverted or reversed." Examples of *lubki* in Alexander Boguslawski, 1999, http://tars.rollins.edu/Foreign_Lang/Russian/Lubok/lubok.html.

[36] Rationalizing the production of art relates Modernism to the Enlightenment. Habermas, "Modernity versus Post-Modernity." Bürger, "The Significance of the Avant-Garde for Contemporary Aesthetics."

[37] Quoted in Deborah Horowitz (ed.), *Origins of the Russian Avant-Garde* (New York, 2003), p. 21, and in Yevgenia Petrova, "Malevich's Suprematism and Religion," in Matthew

Factory and church have a similar iconography: "The walls of both are decorated with countenances and portraits … martyrs and heroes exist both in the former and the latter; their names are also listed as saints … the question is identical, the meaning is identical, and the meaning is the quest for God."[38] The saint strives for spiritual perfection, the worker for technical.[39]

The description of the factory as a sacramental space is not peculiar given its nearly mythological role in Soviet ideology and the primacy of industrialization in its utopian vision. Indeed, from a formal perspective, painting a saint and painting a factory manager is not fundamentally different.[40] The conventions used for the depiction of the one can be transferred over to the other. This fluidity is attractive and has an aesthetic dimension. But the ensuing image is decorative and superficial. Malevich's interpretation of Christian iconographic themes in *The Triumph of the Heavens (Study of a Fresco Painting)* (1907) is a good example of this new aesthetic.[41] The work is in the decorative style. Its haloed, overlapping figures, paradisiacal ambiance and radiating colors suggest classical iconography. The figures are ethereal, the landscape idyllic and illumination has a discarnating (incinerating) effect.

Peasant Head (1928) is another example (Figure 4.1). It is painted on a wooden panel.[42] The frontal arrangement of the face with its open, inert and serene physiognomy has an iconographic quality. Nothing else about the picture in which geometric forms and chromatic fields visibly dominate, recalls an icon. Colorful solids tightly packed in tubular zones that simultaneously channel and arrest movement frame the placid face which poses like a mask suspended in their midst. Malevich's "icons" included the classical Suprematist square in black. He described it as an expression of God's perfection and a mystical image of the divine essence in which all form was reduced to color and color itself became a divine (divinized) symbol.[43] "I had the idea," he wrote in 1920, "that were humanity to draw an image of the Divinity after its own image, perhaps the black square is the image of God as the essence of His perfection on a new path for today's fresh beginning."[44] A new religion (and cult) needs a new symbolic language: "A

Drutt (ed.), *Kazimir Malevich: Suprematism* (New York, 2003), pp. 89–95.

38 Horowitz, pp. 21–22. See also Spira, p. 67 for Malevich's impressions of *lubki*: "I discovered in them the whole spiritual side of the 'Peasant Age'."

39 Andersen, pp. 204–205.

40 In 1930 Malevich was accused of bourgeois tendencies and practicing "formalism" in the official press and imprisoned by the OGPU (United State Political Agency). See Horowitz, p. 21.

41 The painting is shown in Spira, pp. 53–54, #19.

42 Two different versions of the painting exist from the same period in the collection of the Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia. The image is reproduced in Horowitz, p. 193.

43 Petrova, "Malevich's Suprematism and Religion," pp. 89–95. Nina Gurianova, "The Supremus 'Laboratory-House:' Reconstructing the Journal," in Drutt, pp. 45–59. Christina Lodder, "Searching for Utopia," in Wilk, pp. 23–69.

44 Petrova, "Malevich's Suprematism and Religion."



4.1 Kazimir Malevich, *Peasant Head*, 1928, Russian State Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia

mystery is the creation of a symbol and the symbol is the real appearance of the mystery; by it new sacraments are attained."[45]

According to Yevgena Petrova, "Malevich employed the black square to incarnate the perfection of modern God … Malevich's icon oeuvre was reclaiming the icon for art, in a new, updated form."[46] Alfia Nizamutdinova wrote about another, very similar, version of this painting, titled *Head of a Peasant* (1928–1929): "The red Suprematist cross is Malevich's Golgotha.

45 Andersen, p. 80.
46 Ibid., p. 91.

This image is the key to understanding the peasant theme in Malevich's oeuvre and the artist's own personal philosophy of the world."[47] We should be careful not to take these statements too literally. It is actually quite difficult to infer from the flat, stiff face of the figure in the picture anything about the artist's identification with Christ's Passion. The composition's stillness may seem to suggest something of the tranquility of icons—here translated into a work of pure geometry and form. But as in Figure 4.1, it is a plastic reality that one encounters rather than a world of persons or beings to which painting yields. There is no interior space from where stillness originates, only a disembodied fixated gaze, an iconic simulacrum. Expressively vacuous, the face stares at the viewer with the blank eyes of a mannequin. Writing about the 1933 *Self-Portrait* that borrows from portraits of the Virgin Mary *Hodegetria* and other "Byzantine" works of the period, Andrew Spira comes to the same conclusion: "Their facelessness and expressionlessness are frequently more indicative of vacancy than of universality."[48] Malevich's true opinion of icons explains why: "But as we go deeper into new creative meaning it loses even that significance and nothing can be invested in it, for it will be the soulless mannequin of a past spiritual and utilitarian life."[49]

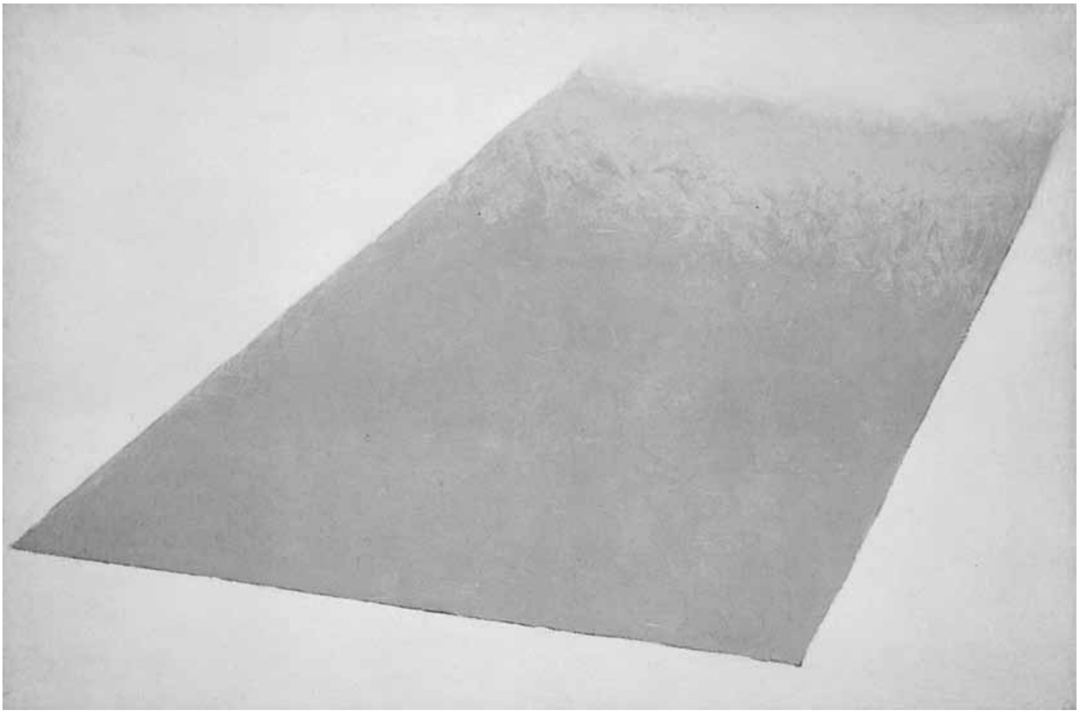
The new spirituality would have its characteristic images. An example is Malevich' *Suprematist Painting* (1917–1918) (Figure 4.2). A solitary rectangle of saturated gold is projected diagonally against a richly toned white background, its open side evaporating like irradiated mist.[50] The luminous, vibrating field that forms where the edges dissolve, has an intensity and warmth that bring color to a state of ontological exuberance and animation (see also Chapter 13). Geometry and color dominate the composition. The contrast between the solid, closed and descending lower side of the rectangle and that of its vaporous, open and ascending upper side creates a tension and a dynamic balance. The figure descends toward solidity and ascends toward dissolution. Surrounded by a luminous space, it has a metaphysical quality that would be appropriate for the contemplation of the Platonic *eide*. Abstraction here is hypostatic in one respect only. There is an inherent resistance to dissolution. This precarious state, however, is not the result of a visible act of self-integration (or self-determination). The rectangle seems to be sustained in that position by an invisible trajectory or force rather than by its own integral being. Yet, despite its dominance, the object does not have a life of its own; it does not posit itself as a being (rectangular, yellow, at rest etc.). The image is

[47] On Malevich's use of the symbols and composition of Orthodox iconography to convey personal experiences e.g., in *Head of a Peasant* (1928–1929), see the brief commentary by Nizamutdinova and a more extensive discussion by Misler and Bowlt, "The 'New Barbarians'," in Horowitz, pp. 26–45.

[48] Spira, p. 163.

[49] Andersen, p. 170.

[50] Drutt, pp. 190–193.



4.2 Kazimir Malevich, *Suprematist Painting*, 1917–1918, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

"spiritual" only in a philosophical, metaphysical sense. Its universe is one in which God is a force and beings its abstract objects.

Other artists also experimented with *lubki* and icons. They include Natalia Goncharova, Wassily Kandinsky, Vladimir Tatlin and Mikhail Larionov. Like Malevich, they were formalists.[51] Kandinsky's *St. George (Version II)* (1911) is based on the Saint's traditional portrayal in Orthodox iconography. It is composed of disjointed planes and patches of intense color. A vaguely visible figure is superimposed on what might loosely be interpreted only as an animal of some kind (we shall return to Kandinsky and this work in Chapter 14).[52] It is possible to imagine a symbolic reading of the image based on its title and the artist's remarks but this would be an imposition. Its dominating quality is the sharp colors and the explosive arrangement of the intersecting and colliding planes. An exaggerated plasticity dominates the painting.

Another example is *The Sailor* (1911) by Tatlin (Figure 4.3). The painting dramatizes facial highlights, uses size to impart significance on a figure and exaggerates geometrical qualities found in folk iconography, associated in Russia with the Old Believers.[53] Unlike Goncharova, Malevich and Larionov,

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[51] Horowitz, p. 33.

[52] Ibid., pp. 134–135.

[53] Ibid., pp. 138–139. The painting was part of a series of studies on sailors based on Tatlin's 1909–1911 trips to Greece, Turkey and Libya. See also Camilla Gray, *The Russian Experiment in Art 1863–1922* (London, 1962), p. 135.



4.3 Vladimir Tatlin, *The Sailor*, 1911, Russian State Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia

Tatlin was interested in the classical Byzantine icon. He had trained as an icon painter and early in his career copied frescos in Novgorod churches. His careful study of icon composition, color and lighting is evident in other paintings (e.g., *Nude*, 1913) in which arched lines and highlights impart rhythm, volume and figural integrity that recall medieval Russian icons (see Chapter 13, *The Appearance of the Angel to the Myrrh-Bearing Women*, Moscow c. 1497).[54]

Spira finds this and other Tatlin works that were inspired by icons moving: "Tatlin clearly acknowledged the expressionistic and socialist potential of icons (as exploited by Larionov and Malevich) but at this stage of his career [1913] it was primarily the melancholy poetry of their pictorial style to which he kept returning."[55] The evocation of character and mood is evident in the sailor's honest, youthful appearance and the introspective, solitary posture of the woman in *Nude*. It is conveyed by the dynamic intersection of planes and the presence of highlights in areas that define facial and bodily expression. But in both paintings expression is the effect of the composition rather than of the beings that it constitutes. It is a formal phenomenon. Personal being is here an aesthetic value like color or tonality that points not to the painting itself but to the painting act.

Goncharova idealized peasant life and folk art. Her series of lithograph illustrations based on Alexei Kruchenykh's parody of desert ascetics, titled *Hermit, Demon, and Angel* (1913), *Two Startsy* (1913) and her *Mystical Images of the War* (1914), are in the naïve style of the *lubki*.[56] These primitive icons were Russia's national resources and the path to its cultural awakening. Writing in 1913, she declared: "Now I shake the dust from my feet and leave the West, considering its vulgarizing significance trivial and insignificant—my path is toward the source of all arts, the East. The art of my country is incomparably more profound and important than anything that I know in the West …."[57] In his 1913 Rayonnist (Rayist) manifesto, Larionov saw Western culture in similar terms: "Hail beautiful art of the Orient! We unite ourselves with contemporary Oriental artists for communal work … We are against the West vulgarizing our Oriental forms, and rendering everything valueless!"[58] He envisioned the translation of physical objects into units of light rays and like Goncharova exaggerated the influence of Asian (Indian) symbolism on the *lubok*.

"The West has shown me one thing" Goncharova wrote in 1913, "everything it has is from the East"; "For me the East means the creation of new forms, an

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54 Spira, pp. 72–73.

55 Ibid., p. 74.

56 Horowitz, pp. 206–211, 214–215.

57 Goncharova later settled in Paris where she died a French citizen in 1962. John E. Bowlt (ed.), *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: 1902–1934* (New York, 1976), pp. 55–56. Spira, pp. 49–50, 131.

58 Gray, pp. 137–138. See also Spira, p. 61 for Larionov's interest in the writings of theosopher Pyotr Ouspensky (1878–1947) (e.g., *The Fourth Dimension*, *Tertium Organum*). Goncharova and Larionov were drawn to his ideas.



4.4 Natalia Goncharova, *The Evangelist (Saint Mark) in Blue*, 1911, Russian State Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia

extending and deepening of the problems of color."[59] This view contrasted with the more sentimental adaptation of the icon among artists like Mikhail Boichuk and Dimitry Stelletsky in works that recall contemporary versions of the Mexican *retablo*.[60] Goncharova's interest was purely formal. Rather than recycle the icon in a contemporary form, she saw it as the source of valuable raw materials. Matisse had seen an exhibition of restored icons in Moscow in 1911. He had come to the same conclusion: "The icon is a very interesting type of primitive painting. Nowhere have I ever seen such a wealth of colour, such purity, such immediacy of impression … The modern artist should apply them with a sense of measure to create a work of high artistic value."[61]

Goncharova's controversial tetraptych *The Evangelists* (1911) shows four stark, monumental figures in blue, red, gray and green. As in the panel depicting St. Mark (Figure 4.4), the Evangelists appear thoughtful and bemused as they point to the white empty scrolls they display. The narrow frame in which they are confined exaggerates their wide halos, the length of the scrolls and the grotesque character of their faces, hands and feet.[62] As with Tatlin, color and composition are the dominant elements but unlike Tatlin there is no evocation of mood or feeling.

Another Goncharova painting, *Nativity* (1910), is a primitivist version of Nativity scenes as depicted in Orthodox iconography.[63] Like the *lubok*, it is supposed to be spontaneous and unaffected by ideas and concepts. "If religious art," Goncharova wrote in 1912, "and art exalting the state had always been the most majestic, the most perfect manifestation of man's creative activity, then this can be explained by the fact that such art had never been guilty of theorizing."[64] It is a nostalgic quest for certainty and authenticity: "The artist well knew *what* he was depicting, and *why* he was depicting it. Thanks to this, his

59 Spira, pp. 58–60.

60 Ibid., pp. 56–58. See also Misler and Bowlt, "The New Barbarians." *Luboks* are comparable to Mexican *retablos*.

61 Of Matisse's fascination with Byzantine art Spira writes: "The example of Byzantine colourism inspired Matisse throughout his life; photographs of *Hagia Sophia* adorned the walls of his home in Nice until he died." Spira, p. 55.

62 The work was confiscated twice and considered blasphemous by censors. Horowitz, pp. 88–89, 32. Spira, pp. 138–139.

63 Spira, p. 132.

64 Ibid., p. 78.

idea was clear and definite, and it remained only to find a form for it as clear and as definite."[65]

Avant-garde interest in Russia's religious art did not occur in a vacuum. Advancements in anthropological and ethnographic studies, a renewed scholarly interest in antique icons and their restoration, and significant exhibitions of Orthodox art and ritual items (e.g., at the Stroganov Institute in Moscow in 1901 and at the Imperial Moscow Archaeological Institute in 1913) played a significant role.[66] The contemporary writings of Pavel Florenksy on Byzantine iconography are an accurate reflection of this climate. Highly idiosyncratic at points, they are best understood in the context of the controversial sophiological views that he, Sergei Bulgakov, Vladimir Soloviev and others developed in that period.[67] Florensky was critical of avant-garde artists on numerous occasions, but his ideas were very much at the center of the Modernist appropriation of the icon.[68]

Like Goncharova and others, Florensky was intrigued by folk art. He developed an elaborate symbolics of color that could be used as a spiritual key for understanding the deeper meaning of icons.[69] His iconology is an amalgam of theology, metaphysics, occultism and gnostic notions of a cosmos comprised of ciphered spiritual realities. Nothing physical is what it appears to be. The garments of saints are extensions of the illuminated bodies they assume in the course of their spiritual struggles: "[the saints] generate in their physical bodies new tissues of lightbearing organs so that their bodies may be brought continually closer to the great sphere of spiritual energies; in terms of visual perception, this spiritual expansion of the body is symbolized by the clothes."[70] These ideas are further developed in his 1922 essay "Celestial Signs: Reflections on the Symbolics of Colours."[71]

Their theosophical nature cannot be fully appreciated unless read in the context of an earlier work, his 1913 essay on "The Stratification of Aegean Culture." "To understand the philosophy of the New Age," he writes, "we must turn to the philosophy of Antiquity … the distant, half-ghostly shades of the Minoses and Pasiphaes, the shade of those who bore the most ancient daytime culture of the pre-Hellenic world."[72] The inclusion of the icon in a

[65] Ibid.

[66] Yevgenia Petrova, "The Origins of Early Twentieth-Century Russian Art," in Horowitz, pp. 9–24. Misler and Bowlt, "The New Barbarians."

[67] In Florensky, "Sophia" is "metaphysical dust," "divine light," the "paradisiacal aspect of being," the "infernal darkness," etc. Ouspensky, whose fusion of anthropology, myth, scientism and the occult resembles Florensky's—and Kandinsky's—was opposed to avant-garde art. Misler, *Pavel Florensky*, pp. 121–122, 59, 61.

[68] Ibid., pp. 115–117. For a comparison of Florensky's and Kandinsky's views of icons, see Victor Bychkov, *The Aesthetic Face of Being: Art in the Theology of Pavel Florensky*, trans. R. Pevear and L. Volokhonsky (Crestwood, 1993), pp. 61–62.

[69] Misler, *Pavel Florensky*, pp. 46–53.

[70] Pavel Florensky, *Iconostasis*, trans. Donald Sheehan and Olga Andrejev (Crestwood, 1996), p. 118.

[71] Ibid., pp. 119–122.

[72] Ibid., p. 143.

world of images, emanations and mythical realities imparts a cosmic and magical significance to its symbolism and connects it with the transcendent realities that shape culture. Five years earlier, in 1908, Lev Bakst had painted a statue of a Greek *kore* emerging from the chasm of a primordial landscape. Florensky was very impressed by the painting and praised its mythical and primordial content: "It is not surprising that for one of the most cultured of Russian artists, Lev Bakst, the destruction of Atlantis became a source of inspiration for his painting *Terror Antiquus*, surely the most significant work that our history painting has produced in recent years."[73]

Modernists used the icon to create a similar mythology. They assigned to icons an Eastern and Asian origin (e.g., with Armenian and Georgian roots) that was meant to emphasize both their primitiveness and their superior aesthetic quality. An aesthetic archetype, the icon had essentially given rise to Western art.[74] Its rediscovery would initiate a new beginning, the return of an archetypal form of art. The artist, critic and theoretician of Neoprimitivism, Aleksandr Shevchenko, wrote in 1913: "The simple, unsophisticated beauty of the *lubok*, the severity of the primitive, the mechanical precision of construction, nobility of style, and good color … Primitive art forms—icons, *lubki*, trays, signboards, fabrics of the East etc.—these are specimens of genuine value and painterly beauty." The fact that since the seventeenth century, *lubki* had been mechanically reproduced does not seem to affect their authenticity.

Mechanized but also arcane, simple and yet powerful, these images had the power to re-civilize Europe:

> Russia and the East have been indissolubly linked from as early as the Tatar invasions … the whole of our culture is an Asiatic one, and foreign craftsmen, architects, weavers … who came to our 'barbaric' country from the West … fell under the influence of Tatar culture, of the East, of our more distinctive, more temperamental spirit, and Western civilization crumbled to dust before the culture of the East.[75]

They were sources of inspiration but they were also there for the artist to exploit: "We take *lubok*, the primitive, and the icon as the point of departure for our Art, for in them we find the sharpest and most direct perception of life; moreover, a purely aesthetic perception."[76]

Goncharova's admirers included the Russian poet Nikolai Gumilyov (1886–1921), a fan of contemporary developments in ethnography and anthropology. Avant-garde theoretician and poet Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918) praised her designs of the stage sets and costumes for the Diaghilev production of Nicolas Rimsky-Korsakov's *Le Coq d'Or*, at the Paris Opéra in 1914. He described her as "an Eastern artist" and praised her "command of

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73 Ibid. pp. 54–55.

74 Bowlt, p. 49.

75 Ibid., pp. 45, 48.

76 Elena Basner, "The Creators of Neo-Primitivism in Their Own Words," in Horowitz, pp. 47–55.

aesthetics, where the great truths of modern scientific thinking combine with the secrets of the rich Oriental tradition."[77] In his 1917 poem "Goncharova and Larionov," Gumilyov wrote: "The tender and splendid East/Goncharova discovered within herself … The delirium and the singing of peacock colors/From India to Byzantium … Who's dozing, if not Russia?/Who has a dream of Christ and Buddha?"[78]

Goncharova was commissioned in 1915 to design the stage sets for Diaghilev's aborted Byzantinesque ballet *Liturgie*, a choreographed reenactment of the Byzantine liturgy.[79] Spira considers her sketches and paintings as "the most abstract and dramatic works of Goncharova's entire oeuvre."[80] Like the *Evangelists*, *Design for the Stage Set of Liturgie* (1915) was inspired by the naïve figuration and makeshift composition of the *lubki* rather than the introspective eloquence and expressive subtlety that characterizes the classical Russian icon.[81] The work is unemotional, impersonal and hollow, with exaggerated gestures and abrupt movements. *Lubki* have a charming and sometimes enchanting roughness. Here, this quality is exaggerated in form and scale and it turns into yet another metaphor for the primitive.

In Modernist hands, icons and *lubki* are deprived of their identity and serve as aesthetic resources. They become displaced and appropriated objects, colonized in their own space and through their own language by the very people who idealize them as originary and discard them as redundant. For Malevich, "an icon in a museum collection is an object in which the religious fiction has been dropped while the non-objective art and reality have remained in it."[82] Russians traditionally placed icons at the corners of rooms. Malevich chose this position for his *Black Square* in the first Suprematist exhibition in Petrograd (St. Petersburg): "… I see the justification and true significance of the Orthodox corner in which the image stands, the holy image, as opposed to all other images and representations of sinners."[83]

The avant-garde interpretation of the icon was Romantic, sentimental and utilitarian. Having separated the aesthetic aspects of the *lubok* and icon from their theology, history and tradition, it was easy to see them as formal objects. But the separation was not total. The discarded elements could be used rhetorically, as we have seen. The religious *lubok* was an expression of piety and popular imagination. The classical icon reflected an ascetic sensibility. The avant-garde "icon" had none of these qualities. And yet, it was often embedded in a language of transcendence (theological and metaphysical), as if it had to go on speaking in the voice of its obsolete archetype. Malevich

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77 Yevgeny Kovtun, *Russian Avant-Garde: The Uncompleted Chapters*, ed. Yevgenia Petrova (Moscow, 1999), p. 28.

78 Ibid., pp. 32–33.

79 Spira, pp. 133–135. Composer Igor Stravinsky refused to write the score for the ballet on the grounds that it presented Orthodox liturgy as "art."

80 Ibid., pp. 135.

81 This work is reproduced in ibid., p. 134.

82 Ibid., pp. 142–144.

83 Ibid.

claimed that his art could restore for humanity the "absolute perfection" that marked man's original state before the fall.[84] And yet his art is devoid of any tangible emotional and existential significance.

But there were also exceptions. When they turned to the classical icon, some avant-gardes were particularly insightful and sensitive. Larionov's comparison of Russian icons with their Greco-Byzantine models shows an appreciation for the theological dimension of form in iconography:

> They [saints in Russian icons] are not human beings transformed into saints, as in Greek and Byzantine icons; they are saints that have taken on a remote and symbolic human appearance, without crossing the limit of verisimilitude, in order to be recognised, and to be seen to be of human origin. They preserve their human forms but these forms are transposed into rhythmic style through which life—spiritual and mystical life rather than naturalistic 'real' life—expresses itself, flows and is held before the human eye.[85]

The icons he has in mind here are the legacy of Russia's medieval iconography. The association of a delicate, ambiguous verisimilitude with the mystical life is especially perceptive as is the observation of how these icons contain a unique visual rhythm that is essential to their spirituality (the comparison with the Greek icon is another matter).

Larionov's comments recall the work of contemporary art historian Nikolai Tarabukin. Tarabukin studied the narrative and compositional dynamics of medieval icons, and the use of geometrical abstraction and symmetry to impart rhythm. Spira identifies these elements in the non-objective paintings of Aleksandr Rodchenko.[86] In the 1930s, while Modernism was becoming unpopular with the Soviet state, the technical study of pigments and wall painting techniques in Russia's medieval monasteries and churches became part of the curriculum of art schools and clubs.[87]

Tarabukin was part of a rising academic and scientific interest in the techniques and preservation of medieval iconography that ran parallel with the various avant-garde movements and intersected with them at various points. Florensky's iconology is one example. It combined a scientific interest in light and color with the view of the icon as a cultic object whose hidden symbolic life could be expressed dynamically in the liturgy. His idea that the icon is "the center of an entire cluster of conditions, which alone make possible its existence as something artistic" is replicated in contemporary studies of the icon as a dramatic (performative) object (e.g., by Pentcheva).[88]

The most remarkable response to the Byzantine icon was that of Marc Chagall. More than most of his contemporaries, Chagall was aware of the aesthetic limitations of folk art and realized that the religious content of

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84 Ibid., pp. 148–149.
85 Ibid., pp. 59–60.
86 Ibid., pp. 95–98.
87 Ibid., pp. 84–85.
88 Misler, *Pavel Florensky*, pp. 106–107.



4.5 Marc Chagall, *The Cattle Merchant*, 1912, Kunstmuseum, Basel, Switzerland

Russian medieval iconography is too essential to its form to be compatible with a secular and eclectic sensibility. On numerous occasions he cautioned against the infringement of theory on the making and experience of the work of art. We will discuss Chagall's views on this subject in detail in Chapter 14. Here, we briefly consider the influence of Orthodox iconography on his work.

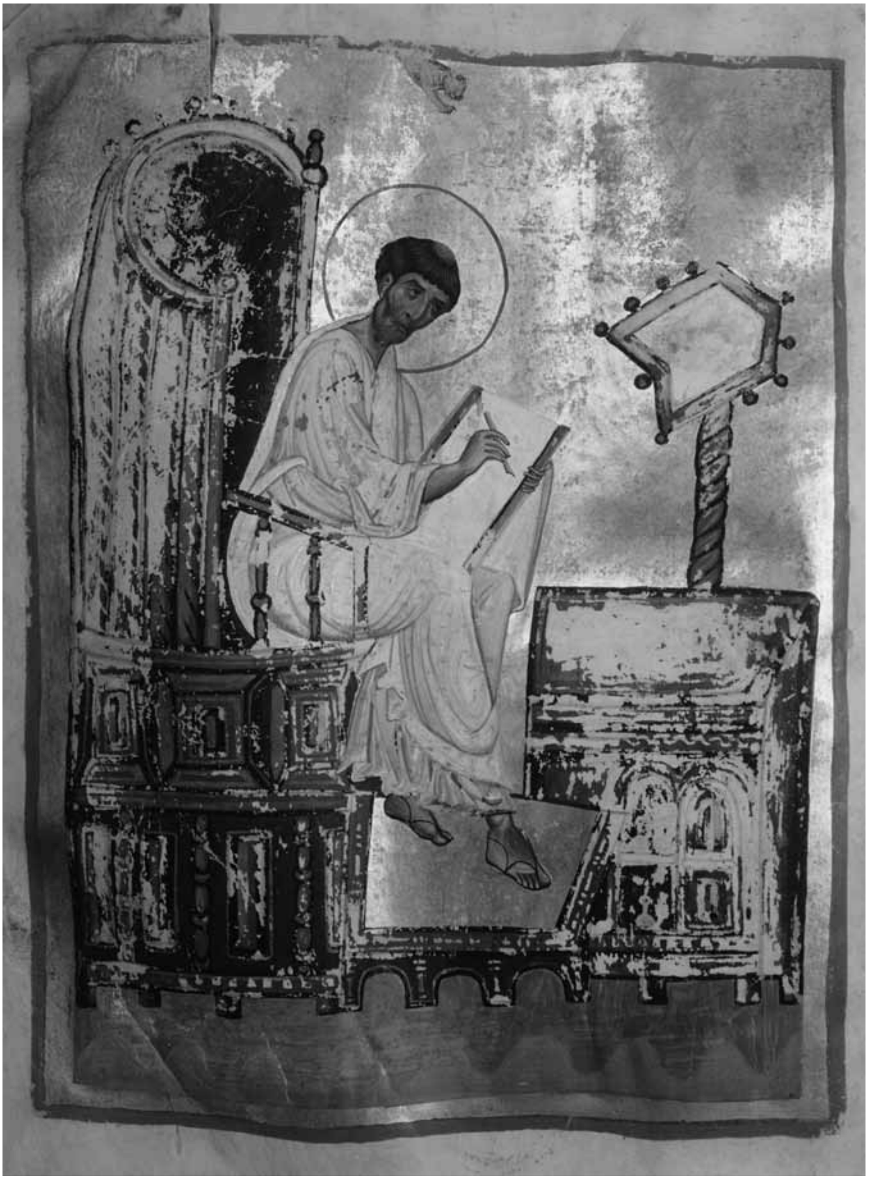
Even though it is dominated by Hasidic imagery, Chagall's early work reveals a very careful student of the Orthodox icon.[89] This is evident in paintings with Christian themes like the 1912 *Dedicated to Christ*, but also in the 1913 *Pregnant Woman (Maternity)* in which a female figure dressed in peasant clothes displays a child contained in a nimbus in her womb. The similarity to icons of the Virgin with the Child Christ standing with arms raised in an Orans position is apparent. Similarly, in *The Flying Carriage* (1913), the gestures of the figure in the ascending carriage recall medieval depictions of Elijah's fiery ascent to heaven.[90] Another early work, *The Cattle Merchant* (1912) (Figure 4.5), shows a variation on the gestation theme while the shaping of the body and clothing of the woman shown carrying a calf on her shoulders (reminiscent of "The Good Shepherd") is very much in the manner of Byzantine iconography.

The influence persists in later works. The 1920 panel, titled *Literature* (State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow) prepared for the State Jewish Chamber Theatre in Moscow (GOSECT), has no Christian theme but its composition is also indebted to Byzantine compositions.[91] It recalls icons of the Evangelists seated at the scriptorium either in a monastic room or in the desert.

[89] Benjamin Harshav, "Jewish Art and Jesus Christ," in Jacob Baal-Teshuva (ed.), *Chagall: A Retrospective* (New York, 1995), pp. 299–302.

[90] Misler, *Pavel Florensky*, pp. 128–129.

[91] The Guggenheim Museum, *Marc Chagall and the Jewish Theatre (Exhibition Catalogue)* (New York, 1992), Plate #7, pp. 149–150.



4.6 *St. Luke Writing at his Desk*, 12th century, National Library, Athens, Greece

This is evident in the positioning and posture of the painting's solitary figure, in its elongated form, in the faceting and reverse perspective, the angular contours of the scribe's clothing, and the overlapping and intersecting planes that surround him. Like the icon of St. Luke that we see here in Figure 4.6, *Literature* exudes a pensive and tranquil mood. One gets the sense (even with the more *lubki*-like upper part of the painting) that it belongs to the same place and time, with its Byzantine archetype, and that it too inhabits a world in which to write is an act of silent conversation with words and with one's soul. *Cattle Merchant*, *Literature* and other works from

this period show more than a casual familiarity with Orthodox iconography and an eclectic experimentation with its forms. They are actually *Hasidic icons*.

Indeed, in a 1946 interview, Chagall explained that in his early years he had turned to Russian folk art hoping that we would find there "an art of the soil, not one uniquely of the head" only to realize that it lacked "the refinements of civilization."[92] But it was the classical icon that impressed him deeply:

> The refined art of my native land was a religious art, I saw the quality of a few great productions of the icon tradition—Rublev's work, for example. But this was fundamentally a religious art and I am not, and never have been religious … To achieve the combination of refined expression with an art of the earth, I felt I had to seek the vitalizing waters of Paris.[93]

Another statement is even stronger:

> To see the world as an indivisible whole, to embrace both the beginning and the end at once, what purity! That is why I love icons so much. I owe a lot to icon painting. It is an art full of spirituality, unembarrassed by devices. For devices kill purity.[94]

In *The Cattle Merchant*, animals and humans penetrate the night with their luminous forms and dignified existence, their bodies tangible and solid and yet light enough to float in space and move within their own realities, full of a mystical eloquence. In *Literature* too there are voices. The timelessness and intimacy of the mystical moment of the writing and reading act in which the scribe is engaged suggest a world of solitary communion that unites human beings, animals and nature. The animal breathes out (or feeds on) letters while the child somewhere in that space is either learning to read or chant. The man's faceted body, the table set open, the overlapping planes and collage-like flatness of the composition, the tranquil vivacity of its colors (particularly the contiguous planes of dark and lighter blue), and the elegance and simplicity of form, line and shape, create an image in which Modernism and the icon converge. Here there is no tension between one style and the other, one aesthetic and the other. And it is not really necessary to speak in terms of movements or schools etc.—exactly as Chagall explained.

The Byzantine icon inhabits Chagall's art. It permeates his works in the way that memories permeate our minds and senses. Sometimes it is a fleeting image, buried deep inside a painting's colors and the mood and atmosphere they exude. Other times, it appears as a quality in the composition of a picture and sometimes it is only an intuition of something

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92 James Johnson Sweeney, "An Interview with Marc Chagall," in Baal-Teshuva, *Chagall*, pp. 276–279.

93 Ibid.

94 Ibid.

in and about the image that has escaped time and lives in eternity. Many of his paintings (especially between 1911 and 1940) create effulgent plastic and visceral worlds—rooms, streets, fields and landscapes—where beings of all kinds live vibrant, resolute and ineffable lives, even in the midst of great turmoil and suffering (see Chapter 13).

His friend and publisher, Tériade saw his work in similar terms.[95] "In Chagall," wrote Tériade,

> abstraction is constant, but rather than reducing things to geometric elements, abstracting them first, in order to then construct the unity of his plastic world, he prefers to leave them as they are. As if through a dream pursued that spontaneously connects things on the plane of the imagination, he arranges his memories of beings and objects according to an order dictated by his soul, and with the feeling of establishing a reality that is truly his own.[96]

Chagall spoke about art plainly. Compared to the writings of Kandinsky or Malevich, his words have the simplicity and terseness of a craftsman. This is largely because what he said as a painter was said in what he painted. While his contemporaries improvised on the icon, Chagall simply painted his own. This was ironically what Goncharova had aspired to do in her work. *Literature* has no hint of rhetoric. It is not part of a programmatic vision about art. It has no dreams of transcendence. It does not signify the theophany of a new religion or ideology. It is in its own being an instance of immersion in the transcendent and immanent mystery of the divine Word. We see in this instance how Modernism is not opposed to Christianity (or Judaism). But we also see that in this instance it is not the art-critical and -historical category that we take it to be but a historical manifestation of the perennial being of art.

In a 1973 interview with Russian critic and art historian Aleksandr Kamensky, Chagall talked about the need to keep the artist free from conceptual forms and constructs: "Movements! There are painters and that's it. Movements—they are theoretical conceptions. And the great painters have always been above movements … In order to speak of art you must talk in concrete terms and not clutter your thoughts with abstract concepts."[97] "You are far too preoccupied with theories," he explained to a young Italian painter, "when all that matters is quality, and one is born with that. There may be quality in your work, but it is obscured by schools of thought."[98]

Chagall, in my view, painted the only avant-garde icons of his generation. *Literature* is one of them and further study of his early works may reveal more.

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[95] Tériade was the pseudonym of the Greek critic and art collector Efstratios Eleftheriades, publisher of Chagall's illustrations of the Bible. E. Tériade, "Chagall and Romantic Painting," in Baal-Teshuva, *Chagall*, pp. 136–145.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Aleksandr Kamensky, "A Conversation with Chagall," in Baal-Teshuva, *Chagall*, pp. 321–325.

[98] Virginia Haggard, "Homage to Chagall," in Baal-Teshuva, *Chagall*, pp. 256–268.

His appreciation for the distinctiveness of the classical icon was shared by Tarabukin and Larionov. But the poetry he perceived in it was not. Many of his early paintings, like *Solitude* (1933), exude the joyful melancholy (in Greek, *charmolype*) found in the Orthodox iconography of the Passion (we shall return to Chagall in Chapter 14). Their emotional subtlety, oneiric atmosphere and sonorous life resonate with the qualities that Russian Modernists admired in the religious imagery of Old Russia: the naïve simplicity and spontaneous reality of the *lubok*, the elegant and mystical figures of the medieval icon and its discarnate forms. It is almost as if the Modernists dreamed an icon and Chagall created it for them.

For us, Chagall is a bridge between the Orthodox icon and Modernism. His works allow us to abandon the idea that Modernist art is in some essential way opposed to the Christian image. Many Modernist works are certainly incompatible with the way in which Orthodox (and Catholic) Christianity envisions existence. We have seen examples. Malevich's squares and rectangles may resonate with metaphysical notions and perhaps even create a visual vernacular for a new spirituality (Platonic, Gnostic etc.), but they cannot really stand on their own as spiritual beings or realities of any kind. Programmatic art is good for illustrating ideas but it has to take them along wherever it goes. Ultimately, it is overshadowed by them and becomes their accessory.

There are in Modernism—as in all artistic movements and epochs—works that stand on their own and which one must address directly as if they are persons. When we are in their presence, it makes little sense to consider what movement they belong to or what theory of art defines their principles or explains their form. Aesthetics is in this sense a discipline that begins and ends with the work of art. To observe this rule is to resist the natural tendency in the theorist (philosopher, theologian) to bring the work under a concept or paradigm and see it from that vantage point only.

This is what the noted Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain tried to do with Chagall and other Modernists. The result, as we shall see in more detail in Chapter 6, is a good example of how *not* to approach Modernism from a Christian perspective.[99] Maritain did not get Chagall wrong but he took what he saw in his work and rather than leave it where he saw it and pursue it aesthetically, he used it in order to speculate about the artist's unconscious insights and intuitions.

> This obsession with miracle and freedom, with the innocence and a fraternal communication among all things reveals to us in Chagall an evangelical sentiment unconscious of itself and as if enchanted, where sometimes a certain grating of the

[99] For Modernism in Catholic theology, its official condemnation in 1907, and the debate that ensued between its adherents and critics see Michael Kerlin, "Reginald Garrigou-Legrange: Defending the Faith from *Pascendi dominici gregis* to *Humani Generis*," *U.S. Catholic Historian*, 25/1 (2007), pp. 97–113. See also Constantine Cavarnos, *Orthodox Tradition and Modernism* (Monographic Supplement Series, V), trans. Patrick G. Barker (Etna, 1992).

> world of the senses reminds us that here and there the devil furtively shows his horns through the flowery bars of his luminous universe. Chagall knows what he says; he does not perhaps know the range of what he says. That St. Francis would have taught to him, as to the larks.[100]

Maritain had been impressed by George Rouault's prints of the Virgin Mary in the *Miserere Serie*—ambitiously titled "In These Dark Times of Vainglory and Unbelief, Our Lady of Land's End Keeps Vigil" (1914–1927). Occasionally icon-like in their stark simplicity and modeling, the pictures recall the primitivist paintings of Goncharova and Larionov but have a sharp tonality and a dramatic intensity that their works lack. Rouault's religious art has none of the subtlety and elegance of Chagall's imagery. Maritain was convinced that his interpretation of Thomist connaturality would enable the fusion of theological truths with the intuitive, "mystical" processes invoked by many avant-garde artists.[101] This is the formula that he used with all Modernist art. It did not work. Today, as we shall see next, the Catholic Church continues to approach Modernism in these terms.[102]

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[100] Jacques Maritain, "Chagall's World," in Baal-Teshuva, *Chagall*, pp. 147–149.

[101] The etchings are currently in the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Religious Art, at Saint Louis University, Saint Louis, Missouri.

[102] Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco, 2000), p. 130.

5

The New Iconoclasm

Catholic and to a lesser extent Orthodox theologians have made a pessimistic assessment of Modernism and its influence on Western art (religious and secular). It is not surprising that the term iconoclasm has been used in recent years to describe a set of interrelated problems.[1] Principal among them is the absence of contemporary art with a Christian character, the lack of interest in Christian art (present and past) among artists and the public in general, and the steady movement of painting away from representation. Modernism is blamed for replacing representational with abstract art and promulgating through abstraction a visual and imaginational relativism that is at odds with the Christian conception of reality. Secular humanism is blamed for introducing Modernism to Christian art.

In their opposition to avant-garde art, theologians are not battling a stranger but a construct of their own making and one that rests on familiar premises. From its beginnings, Christianity assigned to images two conflicting roles: one of a privileged object of veneration, the other of a humble object (instrument) of service. In the first case, the image is treated as an extraordinary being that is imbued with divine grace and is therefore weeping myrrh, motioning, walking etc.—a dynamic form of existence that contrasts with its material, inanimate character. In the second, it is determined both thematically and to a degree aesthetically by liturgical and didactic priorities. Idealization and utilization are, as we have seen, approaches to the art object that Modernism also embraced together with the ambivalence the latter brings to art's social and cultural significance.

Interestingly, its opponents have also privileged an image that is not properly speaking art. In their attempts to define the distinctive character

1 Most famously by Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI): "The last of these led to a new *iconoclasm*, which has frequently been regarded as virtually mandated by the Second Vatican Council. The destruction of images, the first signs of which reach back to the 1920s, eliminated a lot of kitsch and unworthy art, but ultimately it left behind a void, the wretchedness of which we are now experiencing in a truly acute way. Where do we go from here? Today we are experiencing not just a crisis of sacred art, but a crisis of art in general of unprecedented proportions" (emphasis added). Ratzinger, p. 130.

of the Christian image and present it as a corrective of the Modernist and Postmodernist work of art, Catholic and Orthodox theologians typically make reference to the archetypal images of Christianity, the *acheiropoietai*, images supernaturally formed and untouched by human hands.[2] These images are supposed to demonstrate (how exactly we are not told) the spiritual and aesthetic distinctiveness of Christian art despite the fact that miraculous formation has no specific aesthetic prerequisites. From an anthropological perspective, they are cultic objects invested with psychosocial significance and reflecting practices that go back to pagan antiquity.

This does not prevent theologians from using them to valorize the icon. Thus Paul Evdokimov considers all icons to be superior art because they participate in some kind of theophany. In other words, because some Byzantine images are supernaturally formed and partake of divine grace, the type itself is sanctified and its instances assume not only spiritual but also aesthetic significance of the highest order. Reminiscent of the dreams of Goncharova and Larionov, this Romantic view of the icon invests it with extraordinary qualities. Icons are even poised to save Western art in a "baptism *ex Spiritu Sancto* … nothing less than the death of art and its resurrection, its birth in the epiphanic art whose highest expression is the icon."[3]

The irony of this argument is hard to miss. *Acheiropoietai* are actually indifferent to stylistic peculiarities or artistic skill and may appear in any medium, sometimes on rocks, pieces of wood or cloth, and even in icons printed on paper. On some of these icons time has brought abstraction and ambiguity as often the figures they depict are barely recognizable. But this has no impact on their significance which is determined largely by their function as loci of theophany. Thus Christianity embraced abstraction long before Modernism elevated it to one of its programmatic principles and even invested it with spiritual and metaphysical significance.

Acheiropoietai have a long and fascinating history and as expected have caught the imagination of both East and West. In the West, the *Veronica* (*vera icona*)—the Latin equivalent to *acheiropoietos*—succeeded the Byzantine *Mandylion* that was kept from the tenth until the early thirteenth century in Constantinople.[4] Together with other variants with which its history has fused—e.g., the sixth-century image of Christ's face in Capella S. Matilda in Rome, Vatican and the Constantinople *Mandylion* in S. Bartolomeo degli Armeni, Genoa—the *Veronica* depicts Christ not by virtue of human art but by a miraculous transference of his face on a piece of cloth.[5] The Shroud of

[2] Paul Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty* (Redondo Beach, 1990), pp. 73–95. See also, Constantine Cavarnos, *Guide to Byzantine Iconography* (2 vols, Boston, 1993) vol. 1. For the icon as instrument of theological correction for the Catholic Church see, Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, vol. 2, pp. 508–513.

[3] Evdokimov, p. 65.

[4] For an extensive discussion of *acheiropoietai* and their provenance and dissemination, see Belting, pp. 208–224, 208.

[5] The Genoa *Mandylion* was given in 1384, in Constantinople, by Byzantine Emperor John V to Leonardo Montaldo. See Belting, pp. 210, 268 Pl. III, 54 (#15).

Turin is believed to record a similar impression, left by Christ's body on the burial cloth, a lasting mark of his carnality (and mortality) on the one hand, and his divinity on the other.[6] The image visible on the cloth has a graphic quality similar to that of a woodcut, and shows a human face characterized by a significant degree of abstraction.

But this matters little in this case as the origin of the impression and its evidentiary significance for those who believe that it was left by Christ's body, makes any artistic consideration redundant or at best secondary. Art pales in front of a divine or metaphysical reality. If we recall, *lubki* and folk art in general were valorized by Russian avant-gardes because they were supposed to reveal the metaphysical realities of peasant and national life in ways that academic art could not. However, aesthetic superiority can only be argued on an aesthetic basis, in terms of the qualities of the art object itself rather than its model, paradigm or archetype. As we suggested earlier, the only aesthetic claim that one could make in this context is analogical. An icon is aesthetically significant when it can simulate in its form what the miraculous icon delivers charismatically in its "physiology." This analogy is not arbitrary. It has an ontological foundation: the animated and self-fulfilling existence that all beings assume in a Christian universe (see Chapter 9). Using this form of thinking, theology can actually inform aesthetics rather than dictate it. A *lubok* can assume a similar function *vis-à-vis* a painting. It is the independence of analogates that makes their comparison valuable.

This may seem an endorsement of eclecticism but it actually is not. Analogates need to be studied carefully with an eye to their distinctive qualities. *Acheiropoietai* are the result of a direct contact between the wood, pigments etc. and the divine or holy person whose agency they host and embody. By becoming animated and personalized in this manner, they remain supernaturally active, engaging in miracles and other forms of physical expression (e.g., secretion of myrrh). In so far as they emit actual substances (e.g., oily perfume or tears) and depict recognizable figures (e.g., a Virgin or Christ-like face etc.), they have a tangible enunciating force, similar to that of speech acts. They weep in anticipation of a disaster that will affect a community, or as a sign of empathy and consolation for the faithful. These icons, moreover, are neither exquisitely beautiful nor engaging in an aesthetic sense. For all the emphasis given to beauty by Western theologians, it is not beauty that distinguishes these extraordinary images and has a role to play in their efficacy.[7] It is, rather, a certain kind of presence. Where there is myrrh

[6] Moretto, pp. 74–77.

[7] Von Balthasar: "the blissful, *gratis*, shining-in-itself of the things of beauty is not meant for individualist enjoyment in the experimental retorts of aesthetic seclusion: on the contrary, it is meant to be the communication of a meaning with a view to meaning's totality; it is an invitation to universal communication and also, preeminently, to a shared humanity." Han Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Theological Dramatic Theory: Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans. Graham Harrison (5 vols, San Francisco, 1990), vol. 2, pp. 29–30.

bleeding or tears, for instance, streaks of the substance mark the face and body of the depicted figures and often distort their form. But for the faithful, the experience of divine presence has an abrogating effect on any kind of deformity.

Acheiropoietai are experienced as unique instances of divine revelation, like the holy relics and the fragrant bodies of ascetics and exhumed saints. They are endowed with corporeal qualities of which the faithful may partake (e.g., in being anointed with myrrh), and considered exemplary not for their form but for their ontological peculiarity. They exist, in other words, as material objects, sacramentally constituted, bearing witness to a deified creation. They display intentional, emotive and somatic states and acts typical of living persons. These images thus come alive, an idea as we have seen that Greek art criticism valued in painting. They have *enargeia* in a literal (physical) sense.[8] This is where we can draw the analogy to the exemplary Christian image which has a similar type of vitality and puts forth instances of deified being and existence, not in the manner of supernaturally mediated nature (i.e., as in the *acheiropoietai*), but in the manner of art.

Ironically, theologians who consider Modernism iconoclastic do not realize that they are engaging in a form of iconoclasm themselves by not allowing the art object an independent subsistence. This makes it difficult to calibrate and explore similarities to the miraculous icon and to the full gamut of Christian and secular visual experience where other helpful analogies may be discovered. The independence of the art object, in other words, opens the way to theological investigation. It does not close it. This openness is essential to a Christian encounter with contemporary culture. We know that we have a problem when the use of the term "iconoclasm" to discuss the state of Christian art today is adopted intact from the polemical theology of the eighth and ninth centuries, as if little has changed since. Thus Modernism is approached from an adversarial standpoint despite the fact that it occasionally (and by no means systematically) shares the same disregard for the aesthetic object that Christian theology has embraced for centuries.

We already stated that the theology produced by Byzantine Iconoclasm continues to hold the scholarship of the icon captive. It has an equally strong hold on the way that contemporary theologians deal with modern art. Briefly, the Iconoclastic controversies consist of two radical state-sponsored movements against the veneration of images in Christian worship which ended with the victory of the supporters of the icons (*iconodules*). The first movement, preceding and leading to Nicaea II, lasted between 730 and 787, during the reign of Leo II and Constantine V. Restoration followed under Emperor Constantine I and Empress Irene. The second wave of iconoclasm

8 On the hypothesis that the face imprinted on the Shroud of Turin was the model for early portraits of Christ (e.g., the Daphne Monastery Church *Pantocrator* (near Athens), c. 1100 and the St. Catherine, Sinai *Pantocrator*), see Moretto, pp. 52–53.

occurred between 814 and 842, under Leo V and Michael II, and ended under the reign of Empress Theodora.[9] Pronounced a heresy because it refused to give artistic form to the human body of Christ, Iconoclasm was defeated on the basis of its theological rather than aesthetic implications.[10] In 787, the Council of Nicaea, made a heresy of unregulated artistic expression, and gave full authority over the image to the Church. One of its statutes read: "The making of icons is not an invention of the painters but an accepted institution and tradition of the Catholic Church; and that which excels in antiquity is worthy of respect, according to the divine Basil."[11]

By thus posing a false dichotomy between tradition and innovation and linking tradition with institutional authority, the Council discouraged genuine dialogue between art and theology and the aesthetic exploration of theological ideas. Stylized halos, gold leaf background, script identifying the divine or holy figure portrayed, symbolic objects, colors and gestures, and quotations from Scripture and hymnography were adopted as solutions and are still standard features of Orthodox icons and Christian art in general. Rather than dismiss Iconoclastic arguments on aesthetic grounds, the Church promulgated devotional portraiture and narrative paintings of Christ's life in which his divinity was stated rather than shown. Questions about the ability of art to convey the divine nature of Christ, something the Iconoclasts deemed impossible, were thus relegated to iconographic conventions that functioned as a universal visual language for the faithful.[12]

This helps explain why Christian theology in both East and West has not genuinely engaged art and has taken a defensive posture when dealing with the experimental nature of Modernist and contemporary art. The tendency is perhaps more pronounced in the East where some Orthodox authors even avoid using current art-critical and philosophical terminology when discussing icons, preferring instead the idiom and categories of Patristic texts dating to the Iconoclastic controversies.[13] There is nothing wrong with Patristic terminology in this instance. The problem is the restrictive way in which it is approached. The notion that the icon's sanctity prevents it from being discussed in contemporary idiom or in non-Christian categories (e.g., in a comparative context) "freezes" the Christian image in a certain historical

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9 Belting, pp. 144–184.

10 Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, trans. G.E.H. Palmer and E. Kadloubovsky (Crestwood, 1982), p. 36. See also Ratzinger, pp. 123–124; Christoph Schönborn, O.P., *God's Human Face: The Christ-Icon*, trans. Lothar Krauth (San Francisco, 1994), p. 238.

11 Sahas, p. 84. Examples of Byzantine construction of iconographic "tradition" and "conventions" in Robin Cormack, *Writing in Gold: Byzantine Society and Its Icons* (London, 1985), pp. 146, 156, especially the chapter "After Iconoclasm: The Illusion of Tradition," pp. 141–178.

12 We find distinctions of some aesthetic interest in the writings of the Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople (c. 758–828). See K. Parry, "Theodore Studites and the Patriarch Nicephorus on Image-Making as a Christian Imperative," *Byzantion*, 59 (1989): pp. 164–183.

13 Ouspensky, pp. 463–515.

and conceptual framework that presumably guarantees its survival but in effect ensures its marginalization. We have seen earlier that this exclusivism is not consistent with the Orthodox view of tradition.

The idea of locking the icon within what is understood as its tradition and even presenting it from that standpoint as an exemplary type of art can be seen in Florensky who writing in 1922 argued that the icon is the work of the Church and itself an object that resonates with collective spiritual significance: "every icon belongs in essence to the collective work of the Church; and even if, by chance, a particular icon is fashioned entirely by one single master, some ideal participation of other iconpainters is always implied."[14] From his perspective "the icon is a work of witness that employs art as well as many other things … 'mass-production' is therefore essential to iconpainting, for its sensory evidence must enter into every home and every family …."[15]

These remarks are fully within the Iconophile spirit as is another Florensky statement that sharpens the contrast between fine art and the icon where the latter is seen as an object that serves a utilitarian and yet idealized, function:

> In fine arts, an artist's stylistic uniqueness demands the absence of other people; in iconpainting, the primary goal is always the clarity of a collectively carried and transmitted truth; hence, if by chance some purely subjective view of things spontaneously creeps into one moment of the inconpainting process, it will be balanced in the final icon by other masters mutually correcting one another.[16]

It is hard to miss here the echoes of the collectivism preached by the Soviet state and the notion that the Church is the real avant-garde since its art is not only free from the subjectivism of bourgeois culture but has preceded the communist experiment in being the work of an anonymous and yet sanctified body of workers and painters.

This emphasis on ideality and functionality characterizes recent Catholic arguments about sacred art that are critical of Modernism but do not single out any particular school or style as normative for Catholic art.[17] According to Joseph Ratzinger and Christoph Schönborn, the diverse gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit on the Church and the free character of artistic expression justify a stylistic pluralism in Christian iconography.[18] But this is not given

[14] Florensky, pp. 134–135.

[15] Ibid., p. 134.

[16] Ibid., p. 135.

[17] On the impact of post-Conciliar changes in the liturgy on the priesthood and laity and the erosion of "sacramental iconography" see George Weigel, *The Courage to Be Catholic: Crisis, Reform, and the Future of the Catholic Church* (New York, 2004), pp. 187–188, 26, 76. On the relationship between the liturgy and the desacralization of Christ's humanity in certain post-Conciliar theologies, see Dietrich von Hildebrand, *The Devastated Vineyard*, trans. John Crosby and Fred Teichert (Harrison, 1985), pp. 66–77, 109–125. See also Ratzinger, pp. 129–133; Schönborn, p. 238.

[18] Ratzinger, pp. 133–135. Schönborn: "We do not imply, of course, that a revival of the ancient iconographic art would be *the* way toward the renewal of sacred art, even though it can be, and frequently already is, *one* of the ways." Schönborn, p. 240. See also Fortino, "The Role and Importance of Icons," pp. 124–131.

unconditionally. Christian art must be representational or figurative. As long as this standard is observed, any style is admissible. The importance placed on representation assumes that the term itself is pretty straightforward. From an aesthetic point of view, we know that this is not the case since even a simple line or a dot can represent something in certain contexts. But the predominant mood in these statements is inclusiveness or the notion that the Church is open to all kinds of artistic and cultural expression with minimal conditions. Thus, the spiritual integrity of the Byzantine icon is praised but its style is not considered exemplary in any way. Ratzinger's and Schönborn's sense of the aesthetic is limited to a work's style. The aesthetic object has no other dimension worthy of interest. In addition to being representational, art should be theologically correct and thus deliver the right message.[19]

Ratzinger insists on representation because he wants to see in the work of art evidence of creative activity, an essential aspect of its ordination to grace and to the Church. A recognizable house in a painting, for example, reflects the artist's commitment to the integrity of creation. This integrity must be shown in all things. And as in Plato, art is essentially imitative and must deliver solid rather than impressionistic and imaginational forms. In the Pope's view, subjective or idiosyncratic realities (related to phantasy) have no place in Christian art. God creates clear and legible things. Human art must do the same:

> … art itself which in impressionism and expressionism explored the extreme possibilities of the sense of sight, becomes literally object-less. Art turns into experimenting with self-created worlds, empty 'creativity,' which no longer perceives the *Creator Spiritus*, the Creator Spirit. It attempts to take his place, and yet, in so doing, it manages to produce only what is arbitrary and vacuous, bringing home to man the absurdity of his role as creator.[20]

By this standard, an impressionistic picture of Christ would be marginally admissible, the implication being in the above statement that the visual experiments that preceded Modernism led to the extreme forms of abstraction that it eventually embraced: "Forms of art that deny the *logos* of things and imprison man within what appears to the senses are incompatible with the Church's understanding of the image."[21] A picture that shows patches of color or a few lines without clearly delineating a subject would be problematic in this view. Ratzinger's realism essentially requires of artists two things: to paint the world as it is, and to paint it as God's creation rather than their own. It is interesting that these conditions are not confined to Christian art but must extend to all art if the "iconographic crisis of the West" is to

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[19] Ouspensky attributes this "dehumanizing art" on Catholicism's embrace of culture as an autonomous category bound to human experience rather than to the supernatural life of the Church." Ouspensky, pp. 490–491.

[20] Ratzinger, pp. 131, 123–124. Evdokimov, p. 85.

[21] Ratzinger, p. 134.

come to an end.[22] The cause of the new iconoclasm is an anthropocentric, narcissistic humanism that has forgotten God and being.[23]

Iconoclasm is thus symptomatic of moral and spiritual flaws which art, like the culture that surrounds it, embodies and expresses: "True, Christian subjects are still being depicted, but such 'religious art' is no longer sacred art in the proper sense. It does not enter into the humility of the sacraments and their time-transcending dynamism."[24] Ratzinger's criticism of modern art is part of a more general criticism of contemporary culture that targets secularist tendencies within the Church, the misinterpretation of Vatican II by clergy and laity, and the emergence of historicism as the dominant paradigm of theology.[25] Naturally, then, aesthetic problems will be resolved as part of a systemic solution, on theological and spiritual grounds. John Damascene's (676–749) warning to the Iconoclast emperor Leo III, "you are not struggling against icons but against the saints," is used to emphasize the spiritual nature of this struggle.[26]

Byzantine Iconoclasm influenced Catholic iconology through the *Libri Carolini*. Based on a misunderstanding of Greek philosophical and theological terms in the arguments of Nicaea II (787), the *Libri*, according to Leonid Ouspensky, embraced a "de-sacralized," functionalist and materialist view of the image.[27] Ouspensky considers this document the source of Reform Iconoclasm and the reason why Catholicism has not produced genuinely

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22 Ibid., p. 120.

23 Ibid., p. 129. Maritain: "If Erasmus and his friends … had realized that reason does not suffice in order for one to be right, above all if there had not been for so long such manifold abuses of grace in Christendom, the Renaissance would not have deviated so far from that line, humanism would not so quickly have proved itself inhuman." Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, p. 136.

24 Ratzinger, p. 129.

25 Ibid., p. 130. According to Ratzinger the uncritical acceptance of modern art "has frequently been regarded as mandated by the Second Vatican Council." Ratzinger, p. 130. On June 23, 1973 at the inauguration of Vatican Museum's permanent collection of modern art Pope Paul VI called for art to "go beyond the authentically human and express the religious, the divine, the Christian." Fortino, "The Role and Importance of Icons." For critical views of current Catholic art and architecture see Michael S. Rose. *Ugly As Sin: Why They Changed Our Churches from Sacred Places to Meeting Spaces—and How We Can Change Them Back Again* (Manchester, 2001). For a Catholic artist's point of view, see Anthony Visco, "The Anatomy of Sacred Art: Presence, Witness and Transcendence," *Sacred Architecture: Journal of the Institute for Sacred Architecture*, 8 (2003): pp. 14–17; "The Anatomy of Sacred Art, Part II: *Ad Quid Venisti? Quo Vadimus*?" *Sacred Architecture*, 9 (2004): pp. 25–28. *Sacred Architecture* also documents recent and current examples of Modernist and Postmodernist influence on Catholic art and architecture. See, Breda Ennis, "A Vacuum in the Spirit: The Design of the Jubilee Church in Rome," *Sacred Architecture*, 9 (2004): pp. 10–13. For a Catholic Byzantine perspective on this subject, see Abbot Boniface Luykx, "Liturgical Architecture: *Domus Dei or Domus Ecclesiae*?" *Catholic Dossier* (May–June 1997): pp. 31–40.

26 Damascene and Evdokimov are Ratzinger's Orthodox references on the subject. Evdokimov, p. 164; Ratzinger p. 132; Dietrich von Hildebrand, *The New Tower of Babel* (London, 1954), p. 197.

27 Stephen Gero, "The *Libri Carolini* and the Image Controversy," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 18.1/2 (Spring/Fall 1973): pp. 7–34.

spiritual art.[28] From his standpoint, the reason of the demise of Western religious and secular art can be traced to Catholic iconology and ultimately to Catholic theology. Ironically, like Ratzinger, Ouspensky assumes that the character of individual works of art is uniformly shaped by their underlying theology and by eschatological factors.

This idea has become a common place in theological discussion. Its secular corollary is the idea that works of art take a specific form that reflects their ideological environment. Evdokimov describes all icons as having "a mystical sense, a *mysterium tremendum*."[29] Only in theory or from a systemic standpoint (e.g., Hegelian) can one argue that all art is in crisis, or that every icon is spiritual, or that only Christian art is truly art (even though that position has not been fully argued by Ratzinger or other Catholic theologians). The following statement by Ouspensky is typical of this approach:

> Indeed, if spiritual decline manifested itself in a neglect of the icon, the spiritual renewal prompted by catastrophes and upheavals leads back to and encourages man to learn its language and meaning, to become truly aware of the icon. It is no longer viewed as something of the past: it is reborn in the present.[30]

Ouspensky actually rediscovered the icon (and Orthodoxy) as part of an iconographic revival that affected Russia (mainly Russian expatriates in Europe) and Greece in the second and third quarters of the twentieth century.[31] His quest for roots, authenticity and certainty was very much in the Modernist spirit.

The tendency to subject the art object to theological, ideological and in general theoretical priorities, owes a lot to the rhetorical conventions of a more distant era. The rhetoric of Catholic and Orthodox iconologies is in substance a Greek and Byzantine rhetoric associated with *ekphraseis*. It gives a superlative position to art with regard to divine realities or human memory but with few significant exceptions shows limited interest in the art object itself. To the extent that it adds to the image layers of descriptive imagery—much like photography would today in reproducing its likeness—it does not interfere with its structure. It is not in other words analytical or preoccupied

28 Ouspensky, pp. 489–490. During the Renaissance images were also valued for their ability to incite devotion in the viewer. *Devoto*, a term taken from preaching where it meant "contemplative, blending joy and sadness, unelaborate, certainly, and intellectually unassertive" was used to describe the painting of Fra Angelico, by Latin scholar Cristoforo Landino (1424–1498). Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 41, 149–150, 114.

29 Evdokimov, p. 180.

30 Ouspensky, p. 463.

31 To counter the influence of Catholic art on Orthodox iconography Ouspensky and, in Greece, Fotis Kontoglou based their work on medieval and post-Byzantine models. For Kontoglou, the beauty of the icon is "spiritual and not carnal"; iconographers are urged to "write the highlights not just in white but add a little ochre, so that they have humility and compunction." Fotis Kontoglou, *Ekphrasis tes Orthodoxou Iconographias* (Expression of Orthodox Iconography) (2 vols, Athens, 1993), vol. 1, p. 17 (ιζ). Cavarnos, *Guide*, echoes Kontoglou. See also Constantine Cavarnos, *Meetings with Kontoglou* (Belmont, 1992).

with decipherment and deconstruction in the manner of contemporary art theory that considers these methods to be culturally and spiritually purgative if not redemptive. Here the objective is to glorify the image but the end result is ironically obscuration and displacement. Still, as with Modernism, to recall Kandinsky and Malevich (more in Chapter 14), it is the aura of spirituality and transcendence that provokes and sustains rhetorical interest and the work does at times emerge from this verbal reconstruction to show its actual reality to which, ironically, it pales by comparison.

Thus iconoclasm is from this perspective, the legacy of a rhetorical reality and its practices—a legacy that post-Iconoclastic Byzantium vigorously revived—in which political and institutional objectives found expression. Transplanted by Byzantine intellectuals that moved to Italy before and after the fall of Constantinople, it became a universal language for the art of Christianity, practiced by clergy and lay intellectuals (see Chapters 11 and 12). Starting in the twelfth century, under the Comneni dynasty, Byzantine art became interested in secular subjects. In true humanist form, artists of distinction were accorded both honors and creative freedom, and as one would expect took a more personal interest in how their work was presented in public.[32] Gennadios Limouris writes of this period:

> We too often forget that it was from Macedonian art and Serbia that the affirmation of the human in the beautiful reached Italy and in the 13th century inspired there a 'transfigured renaissance,' a divine humanism, which quickly disintegrated in the succeeding centuries. The movement lasted longer in the Byzantine world, culminating in the first frescoes of Mistra in the Peloponnese, and still more in Constantinople with the tenderness and dynamism of the Karie monastery.[33]

Byzantine influence on Franciscan and Dominican iconography and devotion was especially strong in the early decades of the orders' history while Byzantine art criticism was far more sophisticated than its Italian counterpart until the late fourteenth century.[34] The artistic exchange with the West was most conspicuous in the island of Crete, which came under Venetian rule

[32] The painter Eulalius, whose prestige in the Constantinopolitan court gave him license to include his own portrait in a New Testament scene, is a good example. Mango, *The Art*, pp. 182–183. See also Christopher Walter, "Expressionism and Hellenism: A Note on Stylistic Tendencies in Byzantine Figurative Art from *Spätantike* to the Macedonian 'Renaissance'," *Revue des Études Byzantines*, 42 (1984): pp. 265–287.

[33] Gennadios Limouris, "The Microcosm and Macrocosm of the Icon: Theology, Spirituality and Worship in Colour," in Limouris, *Icons, Windows on Eternity*.

[34] For early Franciscan and Dominican iconography in Byzantine style in Constantinople and elsewhere in the Levant and mutual artistic influence following the 1204 Crusade, see Anne Derbes and Amy Neff, "Italy: The Mendicant Orders and the Byzantine Sphere," in Evans, pp. 449–487. For Byzantine influence on European religious and secular culture in the period before and after the Ottoman conquest, see Robert S. Nelson, "Byzantium and the Rebirth of Art and Learning in Italy and France," in Evans, pp. 515–543. In his opinion: "the complex and multifaceted culture of Byzantium still had something that the West desired: its learning, its knowledge of ancient Greek language and literature, and its vast collections of manuscripts."

in 1210 and developed after the fifteenth century into a major center of iconography serving local but also Italian and Flemish patrons.[35] Starting in the ninth century, *ekphraseis* in Byzantium became increasingly more interested in the dramatic effect of the described works on the viewers and, like Italian devotional literature a few centuries later (e.g., St. Bonaventure's *Arbum Vitae*), engaged in graphic and theatrical lyricism that emphasized the psychological and physiological details of a sacred character's behavior.[36]

Examples include works by the ninth-century author, Ignatius the Deacon (c. 770–d. c. 843), and later by Nikolaos Mesarites (c. 1163–?).[37] Mesarites describes the mosaic cycle of the Church of the Holy Apostles through the narrative and teachings of the Gospel. He shows a remarkable mastery of classical literature, Scripture and theology and casts the figures of the mosaics he is describing in the role of instructors and agents of the theology they embody.[38] Only occasionally he turns to aesthetic qualities: "And the lines are not plain, but they please the senses and impress the mind by their varied colors (*poikilo ton chromaton*) and the brilliance of the gold (*katachryso*) and the brightness of their hues (*euanthei*)."[39] Here is an attempt to guide aesthetic perception for the reader who has not seen the work or has not realized its significance. When *ekphraseis* were actually delivered in public, they inserted the images they described in performative acts that impressed the popular imagination.[40]

In their hagiographic variety, they described churches, monuments, landscapes, apostles, saints, martyrs, angelic beings and of course Christ and the Virgin Mary. In some instances, they presented them as living beings, very much in the mode suggested by *enargeia* and *phantasia*: "every painting,

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35 On Cretan artists during that period and the influence of the Western Renaissance on the perception and status of artists in Cretan society, see Maria Vasilake, "Apo ton 'Anonymo' Byzantino Kallitechne ston 'Eponymo' Kretiko Zografo tou 15ou Aiona" (From the Anonymous Byzantine Artist to the Eponymous Cretan Painter of the Fifteenth Century), in Maria Vasilake (ed.), *To Portraito tou Kallitechne sto Byzantio* (Heraklio, 1997), pp. 161–201.

36 Especially in connection to the Passion in the "Seventh Fruit: His Constancy under Torture." Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St. Francis*, trans. Ewert Cousins (New York, 1978), pp. 147–153. On this subject, Gervase Mathew: "The characteristics in spirituality which Western medievalists associate with the Cistercian and Franciscan schools were already apparent in eleventh and twelfth century Byzantium." Gervase Mathew, *Byzantine Aesthetics* (New York, 1963), p. 145.

37 Ignatius: "For who would see a man represented in color and struggling for truth, disdaining fire … and would not be drenched in warm tears and groan with compunction?" Mesarites on the women at Jesus' tomb: "Like statues of wood and stone are the women bearing myrrh, and a strong yellow tint descends on the aspect of their faces, the redness of their blood having run away to the heart, which was the first organ to suffer the shock …." On Ignatius see, Leslie Brubaker, "Perception and Conception: Art, Theory and Culture in Ninth-Century Byzantium," *Word and Image*, 3/1 (January 1989): pp. 19–32. Mesarites' work was composed some time between 1198 and 1203. Nikolaos Mesarites, "Description of the Church of the Holy Apostles at Constantinople," trans. Glanville Downey, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, New Series, 47/6 (1957): pp. 855–924.

38 Mesarites, "Description of the Church of the Holy Apostles."

39 Ibid.

40 Mango, *The Art*, pp. 116–117, 175, 189, 231.

every icon was utterly lifelike, and expressed the very essence of its subject."[41] But more often than not, they followed stylized literary conventions and showed little interest in the aesthetic qualities of the frescos, mosaics and buildings that they described. Expressive elements were typically attributed not to the painted figures but to the holy persons they depicted which in part explains Mango's view that Byzantine aesthetic theory was unremarkable and unoriginal both before and after the Iconoclastic controversies.[42] Mango's question on this subject is very much in the spirit of our argument and as we shall see in the next chapter, accurately describes a problem evident in most contemporary theologies of art:

> the discussion was conducted almost entirely in theological and scholastic terms without reference to the basic artistic problem that any serious theory of images must take into account, viz. what constitutes a likeness. How do we know that an image of Christ looks like Christ? Neither the Iconoclasts nor the Orthodox appear to have asked this fundamental question.[43]

There are of course exceptions which suggest that theology's hand was not always as strong as we might assume. An example is a commentary by the early fourteenth-century historian and poet Nicephorus Callistus on an icon of the Archangel Michael that was painted by the famous twelfth-century artist Eulalius. The name means "eloquent" and was most likely adopted to pun on the vivacity and expressiveness of his images—they were called "*eulalon*" and "*lalounta*."[44] It reads:

> It seems either that the painter has dipped his brush in immateriality to delineate a spirit, or else the spirit remains unobserved in his picture, hiding in color his incorporeal nature. How is it that matter can drag the spirit down and encompass the immaterial by means of colors? This is [a work] of ardent love (as shown by the facts), and it kindles the heart.[45]

The use of color to suggest the subtle corporeal existence of an angel—"a fine body of an aerial or fiery nature"—is a praised aesthetic quality.[46] The artist's attitude to his subject is inferred from the qualities of the image ("the facts"). Intentional elements present in the icon connect the viewer to the artist and cause a sympathetic response. The reference to

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41 Typical are passages like the following: "His Mother, who has transformed motherhood, and His disciples are standing there, fashioned with such lifelike character by the painter, that they seem indeed to be seized by the various emotions of living persons." The author is Emperor Leo VI (866–912). Ibid., pp. xv, 205.

42 Ibid., p. 150.

43 Ibid.

44 Henry Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium* (Princeton, 1981), pp. 11–12.

45 Mango, *The Art*, p. 231.

46 According to John, bishop of Thessalonica (fl. early seventh century) angels are circumscribable spiritual creatures but their corporeality differs from that of human beings. The point is made in dialogue with a pagan opponent who argues that Christians are also practicing idolatry when they give physical form to God and the angels. Ibid., p. 140.

the iconological and theological problem of rendering spiritual beings in sensuous form suggests the Incarnation but also serves to underscore the work's extraordinary quality and express the author's admiration and refined sensibility.

Today, official Catholic documents show the same combination of piety, eloquence and praise for art seen in Byzantine *ekphraseis* and the same reluctance to engage art in its own terms.[47] There is a sense of entitlement with art being seen as belonging ontologically to the domain of religion from where it draws not only its meaning but also its *raison d'être*. According to *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Church "has always been the patron of fine arts" but "has not adopted any particular style of art as her own."[48] It "admitted styles from every period in keeping with the natural characteristics and conditions of peoples and the needs of the various rites."[49] At the same time, these documents are always careful to make the conditions of this relationship clear and affirm Church authority. Patronage is to be exercised "in accordance with faith and piety," with "the reverence and honor due to the sacred buildings and rites."[50] The right of the Church to implement its judgments through local ordinaries or diocesan commissions and experts on the basis of these general principles is also affirmed, but no reference is made to the standards or criteria that will be used in such cases.

Good art should have "noble beauty."[51] What this means is not explained. "Depraved forms," works deficient in "artistic merit" or characterized by "mediocrity" or "pretense" should be excluded or where already admitted, removed by bishops. None of these key terms are defined). *Gaudium et Spes* embraces "new art forms adapted to our times," and urges that "every effort should be made … to make artists feel that they are understood by the church in their artistic work"[52] *Sacrosanctum Concilium* leaves judgment in matters of art to pastors who should be duly educated in order to advise artists and assess their work.[53]

For Ratzinger, by contrast, only ecclesiastical formation can guarantee the sanctity of the work of art. Like priests and religious, artists must be "inwardly formed within the Church."[54] Active participation in the sacraments and life of the Church is essential although standards and conditions are not specified. The implication is that if the artist is appropriately formed, the work will somehow fall in line with the mediation of divine grace: "Sacred art stands beneath the imperative stated in the second epistle to the Corinthians. Gazing at the Lord, we are

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47 Wojtyla's writings about art reflect his work in poetry and theatre. See Karol Wojtyla, *Collected Poems*, trans. Jerzy Peterkiewicz (New York, 1982), p. 24.

48 *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, December 4, 1963, §§122–123.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid., §124.

52 *Gaudium et Spes*, December 7, 1965, §62.

53 *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §129.

54 Ratzinger, p. 134.

'changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit'."[55]

This is also the view expressed by Karol Wojtyla (Pope John Paul II) in his May 1999 *Letter to Artists* (henceforth *Letter*).[56] The *Letter* has *ekphrastic* qualities—as one would expect of a poet and playwright. It emphasizes art's "vocation" in the Church. For Wojtyla, all art is religious in nature and a means to redemption. Being thus incompatible with secularism, it must ultimately be Christian to fulfill its nature. Artists are called to "rediscover the depth of the spiritual and religious dimension which has been typical of art in its noblest forms in every age."[57]

John Paul II attributes the origin of art to the stewardship of the world granted by God to human beings in Genesis and to an impulse in human nature to create art for God.[58] Like most theological literature, the *Letter* concentrates on the artist and the psychological aspects of the creative process—the prevailing tendency of Catholic theory, as we shall see later in our discussion. Artists are invited to a dialogue with the Church but the framework of the conversation is predetermined since art is said to originate from the artist's inherent need for God.[59] They seek "the hidden meaning of things" which the Church possesses and eagerly waits to share with them.[60] They crave for spiritual realities which only the Church can dispense: "Every genuine inspiration … contains some tremor of that 'breath' with which the Creator Spirit suffused the work of creation from the very beginning."[61] Thus, what the Holy Spirit is to natural creation, the artist is to art. Art is an act of faith and a religious experience. It finds its proper aim and mission in the Church. The spiritual character of a work of art is to be judged not by its inherent qualities but by how its maker's life measures up to the teachings of the Church.

The *Letter* praises the Orthodox icon but in general terms.[62] An earlier document, the 1987 Apostolic Letter, *Duedecimum Saeculum* (Veneration of Holy Images), presented on the 1200th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea (787) gives the icon paradigmatic (but not exclusive) status as the "spiritual language of authentically Christian art."[63] Aesthetic aspects are

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55 Cor. 3:18. Ratzinger, pp. 134–135.

56 Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Artists*. An attempt to bridge the gap between the Church and modern art was made by Pope Paul VI on May 7, 1964. See Pope Paul VI, "The Friendship of Artists and the Church," *The Pope Speaks*, 9/4 (1964): pp. 390–395.

57 Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Artists*.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid. Pope Paul VI cautions his audience not to forget "the fundamental canon of your consecration to expression." Paul VI, "The Friendship of the Artists and the Church."

60 Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Artists*.

61 Ibid. Paul VI: "In the very act of making the world of the spirit accessible and comprehensible, you have also the prerogative of preserving its ineffability, its transcendence, its aura of mystery, the necessity of grasping with ease and yet with effort." Paul VI, "The Friendship of the Artists and the Church."

62 Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Artists*.

63 Ibid.

not addressed. The Pope affirms art's "mission of service" to elevate not only Christian art to its proper vocation, but also the art of Western culture as a whole.[64] "Authentic Christian art is that which, through sensible perception, gives the intuition that the Lord is present in his Church, that the events of salvation history give meaning and orientation to our life, that the glory that is promised us already transforms our existence."[65] Images are auxiliaries to prayer and piety: "The believer of today, like the one yesterday, must be helped in his prayer and spiritual life by seeing works that attempt to express the mystery and never hide it."[66] Once again, art is theology in pictures. As Mango had observed of Byzantine *ekphraseis*, aesthetic questions are not raised. What do these pictures look like? What is distinctly Christian and Catholic about them besides their narrative content and symbolism? Works of art are assigned extraordinary psychological and spiritual power but their aesthetic identity remains undefined.

Like Ratzinger, Wojtyla counts among his sources Damascene and reiterates the key argument of Iconophile apologetics that the Incarnation sanctifies matter and incorporates it in the work of salvation thus exculpating art from its once fallen state and securing its place in the divine economy.[67] Once the materials and instruments of art are sanctified, the work itself becomes holy.[68] The Damascene passage from where the Pope quotes reads:

> Of old, God the incorporeal and formeless (*aschematistos*) was never depicted (*eikonizeto*), but now that God has been seen in the flesh and has associated with human kind, I depict what I have seen of God (*eikonizo Theou to oromenon*) … Therefore I reverence the rest of matter and hold in respect that through which my salvation came, because it is filled with divine energy and grace (*theias energeias kai chariots empleon*). Is not the thrice-precious and thrice-blessed wood of the cross matter? Is not the holy and august mountain, the place of the skull, matter? … Is not the ink and the all-holy book of the Gospels matter? … Is not the gold and the silver matter, out of which crosses and tables are fashioned?[69]

Damascene's language is colorful and poetic and the rhetoric flowery. Yet, the text is too burdened with metaphors to allow for the careful distinctions and observations that are needed in order to bring the art object in the conversation (see Chapter 10).

Ratzinger's call for a new kind of art that will "make the Church's common faith visible and speak again to the believing heart," an art that will

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64 *Duedicimum Saeculum*, December 4, 1987.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 On Damascene's treatment of matter, see Parry, "Theodore Studites and the Patriarch Nicephorus."

69 PG 94:1246A. Andrew Louth, *St. John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford, 2002), p. 29.

make visible "the *logos* of things" and paint the Crucifixion as "transparent to Easter" and Christ as "an icon of the Eucharist" is in the same spirit.[70] So are Orthodox claims that icons make manifest the sublimity of God (Evdokimov's "*mysterium tremendum*"), or reach out from an obscure past to fulfill an eschatological mission in the midst of war and catastrophe (Ouspensky and the philosopher E. Trubetskoi).[71] These statements rely on ideas that are too lofty (and abstract) to reach down and actually touch the art object. And they never engage Modernism or its works directly and substantively. It is as if art does not really matter but talk about it does.

Of course, theology should be free to express itself in creative ways. At times, it needs to become metaphysical and poetic, and go out of its way to borrow words that are usually reserved for art and its experience, and use them metaphorically or speculatively. There is promise in this kind of undertaking but also significant risk. Recently, David Hart has defined Christian beauty as

> the expression of an order of vision that cannot be confined within the canons of taste prescribed by myths of power and eminence, because it obeys the aesthetics of an infinite that surpasses every sinful ordering, every totality, as form, as indeed the form of peace; an order of vision that thematizes the infinite according to the gaze of recognition and delight, which finds in every other the glory of the transcendent other, and which cannot turn away from the other because it has learned to see in the other the beauty of the crucified … Because the God who goes to his death in the form of a slave breaks open hearts, every face becomes an icon: a beauty that is infinite.[72]

The subject here is not art but one's experience of other human beings. This experience involves some kind of extraordinary vision of infinitude and transcendence that remains undefined. It is something that we perceive in others when we perceive them through Christ's sacrifice. But we do not really know what exactly it is that we are seeing. The experience is emotionally intense and the transformation of the other happens in that context. We see the person from the standpoint of the Cross and Christ's interminable love, as another Christ. No actual aesthetic qualities are involved in this experience. Infinite, beauty, icon, taste are terms that are at best used metaphorically.

With so much left undefined, questions naturally arise. Why is this experience aesthetic and not simply emotional, a realization of unconditional love for others? What exactly is "aesthetics of an infinite" and what form does it take or in what objects is it made manifest? What exactly is the "beauty of the crucified?" Is the "glory of the transcendent"

[70] Ratzinger, pp. 133–134, 121–122.

[71] Evdokimov, p. 180. Ouspensky, p. 463. Prince Eugene Nikolayevich Trubetskoi (1863–1920) came under the influence of Soloviev but was critical of Florensky and his circle. See V.V. Zenkosvky, *A History of Russian Philosophy* (2 vols, London, 2003), vol. 2, pp. 803–808.

[72] Hart, p. 344.

other the glory of *theosis*? Is *theosis* a form of aesthetic experience? Is seeing the other in that light, an instance of *visio dei*? Moreover, is this something that happens only to ascetics, or does it happen to anyone who brings Christ's Passion to mind? And finally, is theophany a feeling or an experience similar to that of beauty, in the Kantian sense of the aesthetic?

When theology co-opts aesthetic language and tries to do theology in these terms, it shows too much confidence in its own formulations and too little confidence in the object of its praise—be it the work of art or the categories its experience generates. This, as we have been arguing, is a form of iconoclasm. The image in this case is not shattered. It is either displaced or exploited. Keep the image intact and give the art object the reverence it deserves as a *sui generis* being, and iconoclasm in all its varieties vanishes. Modernism had its excesses and its own battles with art's integral being but its art also affirmed, as we shall see later, the autonomy of the aesthetic object. By contrast, Orthodox and Catholic studies of art continue to ignore this object for reasons that we shall consider in detail next.

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6

Theological Fallacies

It is common in art criticism to refer the meaning of the art object to the artist's intention, psychology and milieu. The assumption is that the work is made in a certain way by the artist for a variety of reasons, some of which are made evident in the work while others remain unknown. Thus the work of art is the end result of the artist's intentions, emotions, life-experiences etc. Combined with the viewer's response, this kind of interpretation is supposed to provide a comprehensive framework for establishing the meaning of a work of art. Indeed, these elements are indispensable for creating an engaging narrative about the art object and enabling its integration in historical, anthropological and cultural analyses. But they are not indispensable for establishing its aesthetic identity.

Aesthetic identity is determined by the inherent and "residual" (what is left after external, contextual factors are eliminated) qualities of a painting that result from the combination of plastic or aesthetic elements such as line, hue, tonality, texture, saturation, shape, form etc.[1] These elements constitute the work as an aesthetic object. They enter in dynamic relationships with each other that reach different levels of complexity. Depending on the level, they may be more or less ambiguous and rich in signification. In certain works, as we have already seen, these elements achieve a level of complexity that gives them a significational autonomy or ability for self-expression. In this respect, these works may be said to resemble persons.

This idea is obviously at odds with contemporary aesthetic theory and criticism which approach the work of art as an intentional object subject to psychological, institutional, ideological or gendered construction. There are two problems with this kind of approach. First, it is in many instances irrelevant to the aesthetic object at hand. In other words, there is no demonstrable connection between the biographical, ideological or cultural fact and the aesthetic fact. Second, ideological and psychological

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[1] Monroe Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (Indianapolis, 1981), pp. 88–97, 165–177.

determination cannot be extended unilaterally to the art object. It must also be extended to its criticism. This raises questions about the degree to which one can say anything about art that is not socially or culturally construed. Moreover, the fact that some art can be validly explored and appreciated in this framework does not mean that all art can or should. Propaganda art is certainly ideological. But not all art is propaganda art. Neither does it have to be.

The logical problem that underlies this approach was formulated by Monroe Beardsley and William Wimsatt nearly four decades ago, as the intentional and affective fallacies, both species of the genetic fallacy.[2] In two seminal articles, Beardsley and Wimsatt demonstrated that the artist's intentions and life, the tenets of artistic schools and movements, the nature of viewer response and in general factors external to the work, cannot reliably determine its meaning. The fallacies are defined as follows (in this instance with regard to poetry):

> The intentional fallacy is a confusion between the poem and its origins, a special case of what is known to philosophers as the genetic fallacy.
>
> The affective fallacy is a confusion between the poem and its results (what it *is* and what it *does*) … it begins by trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological effects of the poem and ends in impressionism and relativism. The outcome of either fallacy … is that the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgment, tends to disappear.[3]

In both cases what is undermined is the integral being of the work of art. Chagall, Picasso and Rothko, among others, objected to intentionalist interpretations of their work (see Chapter 14). Picasso, for example, said about *Guernica*: "They [bull, palette and lamp] don't represent anything in particular. The bull *is* a bull, the palette *a* palette, and the lamp *is* a lamp. That's all. But there is definitely no political connection there for me. Darkness and brutality, yes, but not fascism (emphasis added)."[4] This insistence on keeping the work in what Heidegger called its "native sphere," and thus opposing its possession and displacement by subjective or intersubjective agents (e.g., the museum or the collection), turns our attention to what is transpiring inside it, to its inner life in relation to which the "artist remains inconsequential, almost like a passageway that destroys itself in the creative process for the work to emerge."[5] Rather than vanish, as Heidegger suggests here, the artist, in my view, remains enveloped in the work inextricably, so that it is not possible to extract her

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2 W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," in Hazard Adams (ed.) *Critical Theory since Plato* (New York, 1971), pp. 1014–1022; "The Affective Fallacy," pp. 1022–1031.

3 Ibid., p. 1022. Beardsley, pp. 17–21.

4 Chagall also emphasized the limits of art-critical categories relating to methods, movements, schools etc. on interpreting art. Chipp, pp. 488–489, 440–443.

5 Heidegger, *Poetry*, p. 40.

from there by using biographical information or identifying in the work relevant cultural signifiers.[6]

Thus, the objects found in *Guernica* are empowered by the composition itself to be in a certain way and to continue existing as such. The painted bull *is* a bull; it does not stand for one. It is not the artist's idea or ideological sign; it is a being in its own right (and place). Being a painted thing does not alter that fact. The work continues to signify what it is by being *as* it is, by positing or presenting itself. It is very difficult, by contrast, to perceive an intentionally (conceptually and affectively) determined or apprehended object in such terms, in its own act of aesthetic subsistence. Intentions require a semiotic field, a language of sorts and the textualization of the work. And they inevitably turn it into an autobiographical statement—even when it does not actually qualify as such.

The two common mistakes that arise in art criticism and in theological interpretations of art are related to these fallacies. The first is the imposition or projection on a work of various conjectural qualities that are based on the viewer's disposition and preferences or on the artist's psychological peculiarities and assumed spiritual state (e.g., her anguish, piety, holiness). The second is the perception and interpretation of a work of art according to historiographical priorities that reduce it to a prime or typical example of the art of a certain historical period, school or movement. This is the legacy of Hegel's argument that art is historically determined and a substitute for thought until it reaches its end state and dissolution (*Auflösung*).[7] The movement is determined circularly by its latent conceptuality and culminates in the theorization of the art object, its loss of presence and its assumption of a symbolic or semiotic function in Hegel's own dialectic.[8] In its last stages this development centers on feeling where it overlaps with the Kantian aesthetic judgment. The viewer's relationship with the work is mediated and determined by various conceptual constructs which assume visual authority over it—as the verb *theoro* implies—and dictate the terms of its perception.[9] This kind of intervention—which in Hegelianism systematizes art's historicized self-transcendence—has at least two implications relevant to our argument.

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[6] Harries, p. 98.

[7] G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox (2 vols, Oxford, 1975), vol. 1, p. 10.

[8] For a discussion of presence in the work of art, see C.A. Tsakiridou, "*Darstellung*: Reflections on Art, Logic and System in Hegel," *The Owl of Minerva*, 23/1 (Fall 1991): pp. 15–28.

[9] "Now Christianity brings God before our imagination, as spirit not as an individual, particular spirit, but as absolute in spirit and in truth … the unity of divine and human nature is a known unity, one to be realized only by *spiritual* knowing and in spirit." Art's subject matter is "the spiritual consciousness of God in the individual," which sensuous form cannot render. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, pp. 80–81, 520. See also Charles Karelis, *Hegel's Introduction to Aesthetics with an Interpretative Essay by Charles Karelis*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford, 1979), pp. xliv–xlv. William Desmond, *Hegel's God: A Counterfeit Double?* (Burlington, 2003), pp. 111–113, 148–151, 193–194.

The first is the suppression of the reflection-free, spontaneous apprehension of the art object. This notion forms the core of the Kantian argument that aesthetic experience requires the suspension of pre-conceived ideas and regulating principles. Although Kant shifts his analysis toward the cognitive states that accompany this experience, the fact remains that in the aesthetic moment per se it is the object that dominates perception. It does not matter that on the subjective side this act is based on feeling. The second implication is the suppression of a work's inherent dynamism, its ability to "speak" or deliver its meaning to the viewer on its own terms rather than in the terms of those who claim authorship or expertise over it either as perceiving subjects or as users of normative systems of signification.

The influence of Hegel's thought on subsequent art theory and criticism cannot be underestimated. To integrate the work of art in the trajectory of a necessary and encompassing movement—be it that of ratiocinated divine providence (the dialectic of the Absolute) or of the collectivized intentionality that we encounter later in the Marxist analysis of ideology and culture—is to undermine its ontological peculiarity. A work may resist integration by not fitting this schema, but integration in some form or another is unavoidable (i.e., of the work which refuses to be integrated or historicized). The aesthetic is thus removed from its natural repose in the present tense. It does not anymore command attention here and now. Its expressive power is relegated to a concept or conceptual mechanism. Rationality (e.g., Spirit, Absolute) is thus infused in its ontological ground. At some point in the future it will surface and take full charge of its form.

In theological studies of art, the genetic fallacy gives rise to the idea that the work has a supernatural origin, either through the artist's inspiration or by means of a direct relationship to its holy subject. Theological beauty, for example, presupposes or at least involves divine presence or intervention. Where the work is deemed sublime, the distance between the aesthetic object and its absolute and transcendent subject is so radical, that the work exists in a state of extreme heteronomy. Since it can be no more than a *semeion* or sign of the deity's presence or efficacy, it cannot have a substance and ground of its own and must gather its meaning from an outside source. It is understandably difficult to contest the attribution of sanctity, spirituality, beauty and purity to an image that is understood *a priori* as the result of divine intervention. Moreover, descriptions of works by Giotto, Fra Angelico, Raphael, Rublev, Theophanes the Cretan and others place the artist's spirituality, state of mind, life, character and the meaning of the work in a continuum, as if they necessarily imply or corroborate each other. This is a very old idea that we find in Plato's magnetic chain in the *Ion*: the artist's mind and senses are possessed by a deity that has full control over the creation, meaning and dissemination of art.

The notion that a holy (or pious) artist creates holy (or pious) art is accepted by both Orthodox and Catholic theologians, even though they

differ on the conditions that make this possible. Works made by men and women committed to the Catholic faith and sanctioned by the Church, are supposed to reflect (to some degree, at least) the pious and spiritual qualities or intentions of their makers. Once incorporated in the liturgy, an additional layer of sanctity is added. They become sacred. In Orthodoxy, qualities present in an original and holy archetype that is faithfully reproduced are transferred through this process to its picture, as if the image were a mere receptacle for the holy figure whose presence it charismatically embodies. Icons painted by monks or nuns striving for a life of holiness are appropriately called *hagiographies*—paintings of holy beings (painted in sanctity).

To the Orthodox, an icon is holy and thus beautiful when it is created within the Church as an expression of its life in the Holy Spirit, when it faithfully reproduces a holy archetype and is blessed and hallowed by a priest. Holiness is attributed to an image on account of its genealogy or lineage, its orthodox content, and participation in the liturgy (icons are never simple bystanders of religious rites)—Orthodox iconographic manuals see to the first two conditions as we shall see below. Catholic studies of art favor categories established by Scholastic ontology like *pulchritudo*, *splendor*, *veritas* etc. In their aesthetic application, these categories remain largely speculative and their relationship to the art object is never specific.[10]

Essentialy, three agents participate in the making of an icon: the artist, the holy person and divine grace. The qualities of these subjects are automatically transferred to the image. The problem is readily apparent. Christ, for example, is meek but it does not follow from this fact that any given painting of him will contain this quality. Christ is holy but a painting of him is holy when it depicts him as existing in a state of holiness. As we have mentioned earlier, many icons fail in this regard. Paintings of the Virgin Mary are a good example. She has a specific kind of grace (unrivaled by Apostles, Saints and Martyrs). But that is certainly not present in every painting that depicts her. It is actually absent in most. The abundance of genetic fallacies in theological discourse about art turns works of art into sympathetic acts. The image emerges spontaneously by divine fiat.

Many talented painters like Beato (Fra) Angelico (c. 1387–1455) and St. Andrei Rublev (c. 1360/70–1430) were monastics that by most accounts lived holy lives. But not all of their paintings are holy and spiritual. Aesthetic differences may actually decide this matter. The sculptural aesthetic that has dominated Catholic figuration since Giotto makes it very difficult, as many Orthodox theologians and artists have rightly observed, to convey discarnate realities (see below). For example, the statuesque

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10 Von Balthasar uses these terms to free theology from its speculative character and make it a concrete (hence "aesthetic") enterprise. Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 1, pp. 119, 18–19, 120–121, 124. For an Orthodox example, see Hart.

appearance of Angelico's angels and saints with their flat, shallow and frozen postures is incompatible with the presence in them of spiritual life (even in the much praised frescos of San Marco)—or, to put it in a more dynamic sense, with their existing as the spiritual beings that they are.[11] By contrast, the simultaneously intimate and distant face of Christ, formed in a radiating and nearly immaterial flesh, seen in Rublev's Zvenigorod icon of *The Savior* (c. 1394), presents a spiritual being in its own right—even though there are Orthodox iconographers who would find that form too spiritualized or discarnated to reflect Christ's humanity.[12]

We see the two fallacies at work in this passage from the *Catholic Catechism*:

> Sacred art is true and beautiful when its form *corresponds* to its particular *vocation*: *evoking* and *glorifying*, in *faith* and *adoration*, the transcendent mystery of God—the surpassing invisible beauty of truth and love *visible in Christ*, who 'reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature' (cf. Heb 1:3), in whom 'the whole *fullness of deity dwells bodily*' (cf. Col. 2:9). This spiritual beauty of God is reflected in the most holy Virgin Mother of God, the angels and saints. Genuine sacred art *draws* man to adoration, to prayer, and to the love of God, Creator and Savior, the Holy One and Sanctifier (emphasis added).[13]

Art that is sacred, true and beautiful is supposed to "evoke," "glorify" and "adore" what it depicts, and to "draw" or engage the viewer. It is difficult to imagine what features of a work would actually do that, largely because of the subjective nature of most of these terms which transpose states of mind or intention to the work. What kind of form "adores" or "glorifies"? One gilded in gold or precious stones? But what does gold (when not used symbolically) have to do with the "transcendent mystery of God" and how is it that this transcendent mystery can find expression in sensuous form? *We* adore or glorify but can form do that also, and if so how? The authors are confusing the effect that a work can have on the viewer with its nature. The tendency to look at art in terms of what it *does* for us (the affective fallacy) or of what affective and intentional states it *communicates* (the intentional fallacy) is here evident, as is the practice of imposing on art a host of abstract and unspecified theological qualities and operations.

Thus, we read that sacred art should make "visible" divine beauty which is itself "invisible" but appears nevertheless in the person of Christ. Yet, it is not clear what criteria or specific examples we should follow in order to meet or at least understand these conditions. Equally unclear is what it

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[11] For a discussion of the two San Marco Annunciations (1438–1450) and an explanation of their lack of expression on a different hermeneutic basis, see George Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico, Dissemblance and Figuration*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago, 1995), pp. 112–113.

[12] On fact and legend in the life and work of Rublev see Leonid A. Beljaev, "Andrej Rublev: The Invention of a Biography," trans. Ada M. Beljaeva, in Michele Baci (ed.), *L'artista a Bisanzio e nel mondo christiano-orientale* (Pisa, 2007), pp. 117–134.

[13] U.S. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori, 1994), #2502.

really means to make an invisible beauty visible or to paint a beauty that properly belongs to two abstract concepts: truth and love. What kind of form can do that? And how would one go about showing "the fullness of the deity" in a picture? What is the visual equivalent of this expression?

What exactly is the "beauty of truth and love" which is said to be visible in the Virgin Mary? With respect to *what* is her face true and what distinguishes the beauty of truth from, say, the beauty of a young woman? Theologically speaking, the rhetoric is compelling and eloquent, but unless these and similar questions are answered, what the *Catechism* is recommending is not of much use to either artists or theologians. In essence, it says almost nothing about art. The suggested correspondence of form and vocation is also problematic, since vocation implies service and service points to what the work of art can accomplish rather than to what it is.

Finally, the claim that a work is truly sacred if it succeeds in generating adoration and devotion uses the viewer's response as a criterion of both artistic merit and sanctity, and as such begs the affective fallacy. If the authenticity of sacred art is to be measured by the kind of response it elicits, then any kind of painting or sculpture, from the most intricate to the most simple, from an El Greco to a plain Mexican *retablo*, can meet the standard. A plain cross, made of two pieces of cactus wood tied together, could conceivably drive a person to adoration. A paper icon, as an Orthodox nun once said to me, can bleed myrrh. Is this in itself sufficient to make it "genuine sacred art" as the *Catechism* implies? I do not think so.

Let us take another example, John Paul II's account of the Sistine Chapel in the *Letter*: "Here," he writes eloquently,

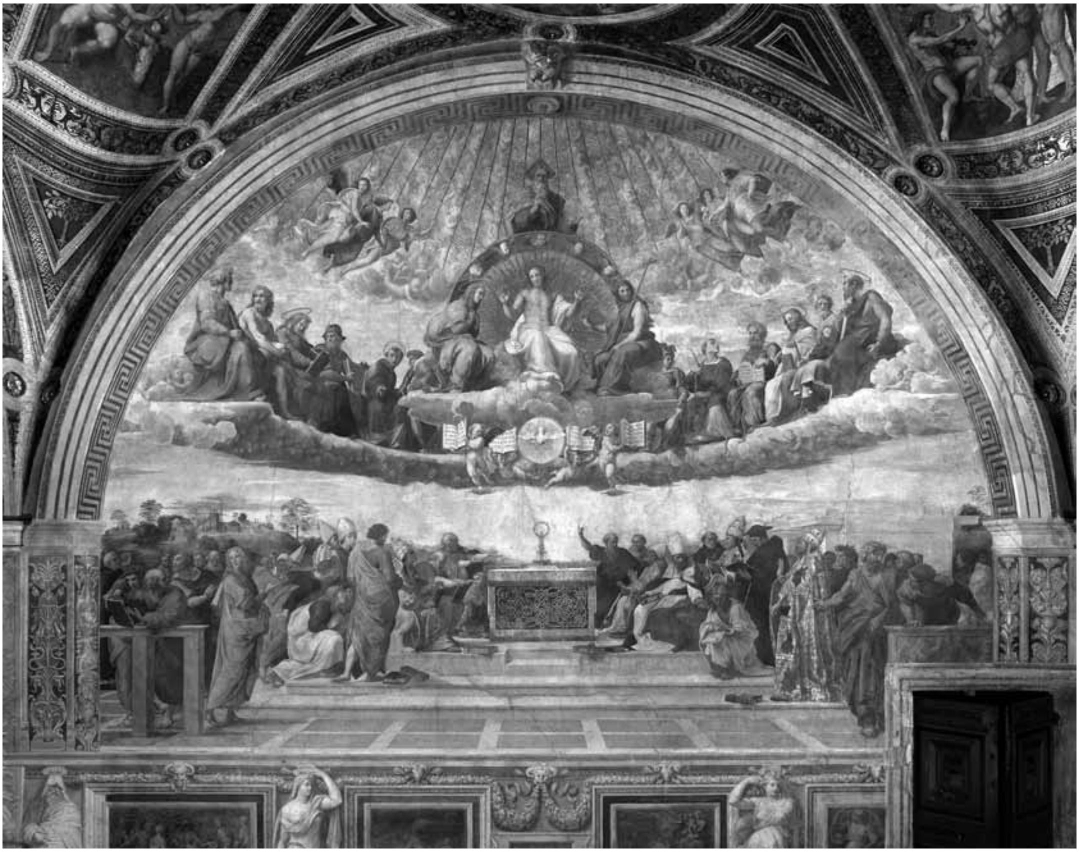
> [the Sistine Chapel] speaks the delicate and profound genius of Raphael, highlighting in the array of his paintings, and especially in the *Disputa* (1510–1511) in the *Stanza della Signatura* (Palace of the Vatican), the mystery of the revelation of the Triune God, who in the Eucharist befriends man and sheds light on the questions and expectations of human intelligence.[14]

The fresco (Figure 6.1), in short, is supposed to convey among other things the mystery of the Eucharist and the revelation of God in the person of Christ. Does it, really? Neither Raphael's genius nor the author's holy life and position should influence our answer.

Without a doubt, the *Disputa* is a spectacular dramatization of the theology of the Blessed Sacrament, a kind of visual epic of the Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist. But its aesthetic qualities are far from meeting the mystical nature of the sacrament itself. Neither does the image have a sacramental quality to it e.g., showing the gathered persons and the space in which they exist in a spiritual modality that would validate the interpretation offered by John Paul II. We do not see a visual equivalent

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14 Pope John Paul II, *Letter*.



6.1 Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio), *The Disputa of the Sacrament*, 1509–1510, Vatican Palace Vatican State

to the statement that describes the fresco as "highlighting … the mystery of the revelation of the Triune God." The image shows Christ in majesty enthroned in heaven. But this is not what the statement is suggesting.

The *Disputa*'s composition, colors and emphasis on the human figure have an epical and majestic quality, conducive perhaps to the contemplation of the grandeur of the Church that partakes of Christ's tangible divinity. Yet, it is the sculptural qualities and the expressly physical, robust bodies set in staged gestures and classical costume that dominate the image. They point to the colorful and exuberant celebration of a mystery rather than the mystery itself. The Church Triumphant is distinguished only by its elevated position in the celestial hierarchy. Nothing in the composition suggests a spiritual manner of existence.

Another example comes from Cardinal Schönborn. In discussing the seventh-century encaustic icon of *The Ascension of Christ* at St. Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, he gives the following interpretation of the mandorla in which the figure of Christ is enclosed:

> an icon within an icon … this indeed is the deeper significance of the icon of Christ. It will not merely recall the past, the historical earthly story of Jesus; it

> is equally some kind of 'anticipation' of the contemplation of Christ that will be granted to men at this return.[15]

It is difficult to see in the icon the complex Christological meaning that is assigned to it in this description. The rendering of the mandorla itself, its shape, color, texture etc. do not suggest contemplation or a state of anticipation. There is no evidence of a "deeper significance" in the enclosed figure of Christ. The author in essence treats the mandorla as a symbol of the theological concepts that are relevant to the Transfiguration.[16] But these concepts have no visible presence in the work. Schönborn uses the icon to make a theological statement that the image itself does corroborate.

We should consider next the concept of beauty. As was stated earlier, its theological use is especially susceptible to the genetic fallacy. Étienne Gilson has written about beauty, as have Maritain, Dietrich von Hildebrand, von Balthasar, Aquinas and Bonaventure.[17] Ouspensky, Evdokimov and George Florovsky among others, have used the concept in their theologies. In the remainder of this chapter, we will look at representative examples from the work of Catholic and Orthodox theologians and philosophers.

John Saward's moving study *The Beauty of Holiness and the Holiness of Beauty* centers on the work of Fra Angelico. His discussion of Fra Angelico's *San Marco Altarpiece* (c. 1439) which shows the Virgin Mary with the Christ Child enthroned surrounded by angels, evangelists and saints, is a good example of theological overdetermination. Under the rubric of a "theological aesthetic," it barely distinguishes between theological and artistic beauty. All claims about the painting are based on the theological qualities of the persons it depicts. The prototype determines the quality of its copy. Claims that "angels are beautiful" or that the "altarpiece gently suggests the beauty of the Triune God" are too vague to say anything substantial about the aesthetic object at hand.

It is not at all clear what angelic beauty consists of and how, if at all, the *Altarpiece* figures deliver it. The same holds true for the beauty of the Trinity. It is hard to tell what aspect of the image it refers to and what differentiates it from angelic beauty or saintly beauty. Moreover, the two concepts, beauty and holiness, are treated as commutable—which is the thesis of the book—when in fact a figure may be beautiful (e.g., the *Mona Lisa*) and not holy, or

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15 Schönborn, pp. 140, 154–155.

16 Symbolism has a long and complex history in Christian art and theology. This icon does not have the sophistication of the Sinai *Pantocrator* which predates it. Symbolism can be especially intricate (e.g., Renaissance myth and allegory) or it can be naïve (e.g., the *lubok*, the Tridentine art of New Spain). On the latter see Solange Alberro, "Retablos and Popular Religion in Nineteenth-Century Mexico" in Elizabeth Netto Calil Zarur and Charles Muir Lovell (eds.), *Art and Faith in Mexico: The Nineteenth Century Retablo Tradition* (Albuquerque, 2001), pp. 57–67, and Manuel Olimón Nolasco, "Sermons of the Religious Orders and *Retablo* Art in Mexico," in Zarur and Lovell, pp. 89–94.

17 Gilson is of particular interest as we will explain below. Étienne Gilson, *Painting and Reality*, Bollingen Series XXXV.4 (New York, 1957), pp. 174–206.

holy and not beautiful (many icons of the Virgin Mary portray a woman that does not meet Saward's standard of beauty).[18] Readers who follow Saward's discussion of other Fra Angelico paintings will also notice numerous instances of the affective and intentional fallacies, the latter especially in connection to Fra Angelico's preaching vocation.

In *Painting and Reality*, the great Thomist scholar Étienne Gilson defines beauty as a transcendental, according to its Thomistic and medieval conception (in which Platonism remains influential). As we have seen earlier, integrity (*integritas*) is an intrinsic property of the work and refers to the unity of its own constitution considered in the modality of existence or organic form.[19] Harmony (*proportio*, *consonantia*) articulates the mutual alignment of parts, and the third quality, radiance or *claritas*, describes the inner illumination of all material elements that constitute the image or work.[20]

In its standard form, this definition of beauty offers an excellent template for understanding how an image or any other composition can be coherent and its form distinctive. From our perspective, *integritas*, *debitas proportio* and *claritas* are inimical to the aesthetic object in so far as it is compositionally sound—always according to the individual qualities of the work. But in the absence of *enargeia*, they are not of themselves sufficient to activate it spiritually (see Chapter 15).

Gilson insists that *claritas*—which describes a condition of radiance in the material aspects of a work of art—is the unspecified "effulgence of the whole painting that owes its existence to the art of the painter and by which we feel softly invaded."[21] This is how the work engages the viewer in a pure act of cognition. But the underlying force, the reason that the work reaches this quality, is an intentional one. The more subtle and luminous the form, the closer it is to the nature of the intellect, the easier it is to grasp, and the more it pleases. Writes Gilson:

> instead of being the colors, the shapes, the attitudes, and the motions of natural mountains, trees, animals and men, all the sensible qualities that constitute such paintings are *entirely subservient to the sole end pursued by the painter's art*. And this end is a spiritual one—namely to provide our powers of apprehension with an object integrally constructed in view of their own act (emphasis added).[22]

It is apparent that in Gilson's view, the work of art is integrated in an intentional trajectory which originates in the artist and terminates in the viewer. It evolves according to the conditions of their interaction. It cannot

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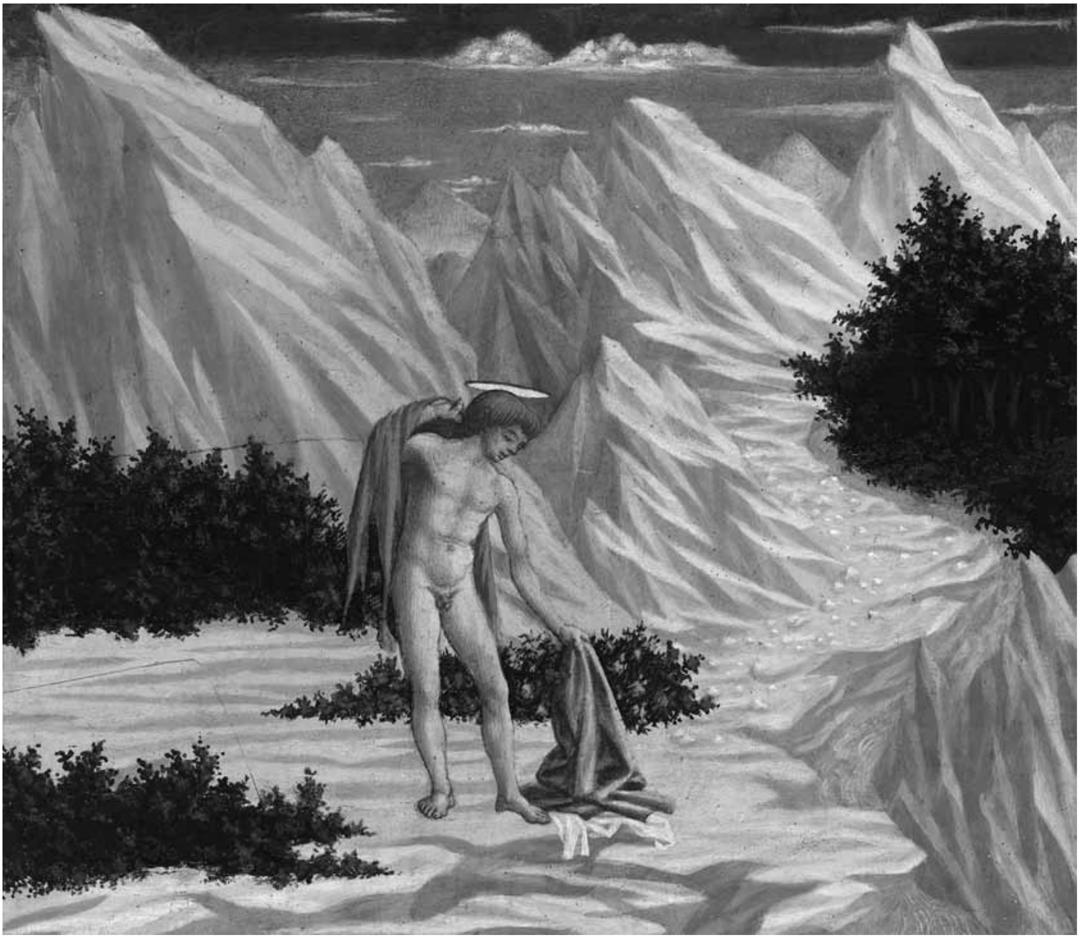
[18] John Saward, *The Beauty of Holiness and the Holiness of Beauty: Art, Sanctity and the Truth of Catholicism* (San Francisco, 1997), pp. 33, 49. The Virgin Mary is depicted with nearly masculine features in the frescos of the Deposition and Epitaph (1312) in Vatopedi Monastery, Mount Athos, Greece. I.M. Hadjifoti, *Makedonike Schole: H Schole tou Panselenou (1290–1320)* (Macedonian School: The School of Panselenos) (Athens, 1995), pp. 113–115, 232.

[19] Gilson, *Painting*, p. 192.

[20] Ibid., pp. 193–194.

[21] Ibid., p. 194.

[22] Ibid.



6.2 Domenico Veneziano, *St. John in the Desert*, c. 1445/1450, The National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., U.S.A.

therefore be autonomous. The work is full of radiance but ironically this mark of metaphysical and divine exemplarity is not its own. "This radiance," Gilson explains in the same context, "is not that of color or of form, or of any particular combination of lines …."[23] It is, rather, something that the artist projects through these elements—as if the art object were a screen in which a creative mind is amplified.

Gilson describes Domenico Veneziano's *St. John in the Desert* (c. 1450) (Figure 6.2) and Paolo Uccello's *St. George and the Dragon* (c. 1455/60) (The National Gallery, London) as "spiritualized" or "transfigured."[24]

The two works are symbolic-allegorical images. They evoke surreal rather than spiritual realities. The Saints resemble mythical and fantastic heroes rather than holy men who actually embody the Christian life.[25] The ornamental figures in Ucello's painting seem to inhabit a fairy tale world

23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., p. 192.

where legend and chivalry rule, with no hint of sanctity or spiritual life. In *St. John in the Desert*, the Saint is rendered in the style of a classical nude that suggests his beauty, charm and youthfulness but nothing of the stark asceticism that defined his life. The soft but pointed hills recall sandstone or marble and create an exotic landscape. Part painting, part sculpture, the young man blends with the mountains that surround him in what seems a blissful and charming moment. If there is transfiguration, it happens at the level of the plastic object. Painting sculpts reality and reality takes the form of a painting. The image points to art (to painting's ability to simulate). The identity of the Saint-Hero is secondary. Resembling an illustration of a fairy tale or a painted tapestry, St. George, belongs to a similar universe.

Gilson's approach is consistent with a tendency in Catholicism and in Western religious art since the Renaissance, to equate the phantasmagoric and mythological with the spiritual (e.g., in the often admired painting by Salvador Dali of the *Christ of St. John of the Cross*, 1951). A phantasmagoric image usually combines realism and allegory (Christian or pagan) in a way that takes advantage of their incongruity. Holy figures and supernatural events are inserted in highly naturalistic landscapes and secular spaces, or in palace rooms, idealized landscapes etc. Saints appear as classical heroes or as their painterly versions. Arts are played against each other. Juxtapositions of this type enhance the painting's imaginary or otherworldly character, as we have seen above.[26] The only way that such images can be called "spiritual" is metaphorically or in a rhetorical sense (e.g., a painterly improvisation or pun on desert sainthood). We can see the appeal of such images (and their religious interpretation) to the post-modern imagination.

In the view of Dietrich von Hildebrand, a critic of liturgical changes brought after Vatican II, artistic beauty should be determined on the basis of qualities inherent in the art object. The concept is qualitative rather than transcendental. It belongs exclusively to "the sphere of the visible and audible"; its elements are "proportion, composition, melody, harmony, rhythm."[27] Hildebrand argues correctly that genetic aspects, like the artist's life cannot explain the spiritual significance and overall meaning of the work of art.[28] But he does not avoid ordaining the work of art to a higher order of being in relation to which the work becomes an emanation or

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[26] See e.g., Giovanni Bellini's *Madonna Adoring the Sleeping Child*, *Madonna of the Red Cherubim*, *The Archangel Gabriel and the Virgin*, Titian's *St. John the Baptist*, Tintoretto's *Assumption of the Virgin* etc. Giovanna Scirè Nepi, *Treasures of Venetian Painting: The Gallerie dell' Accademia* (New York, 1991). Dali's *Crucifixion* was based on a drawing sketched by St. John of the Cross on a piece of paper, following a vision, between 1574 and 1577. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.D.C. (ed)., *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, O.D.C. (Washington D.C., 1991), pp. 37–38. The actual image is reproduced on the opposite side of the title page.

[27] Dieterich von Hildebrand, "Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart," trans. John Henry Crosby, *Logos*, 7/2 (Spring 2004): pp. 189–212.

[28] Ibid.



6.3 Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio), *The Miraculous Draught of Fishes*, 1515–1516, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, U.K.

reflection. Beauty is not a transcendental but it alludes to a transcendent reality. Thus, a work of art is beautiful when "the reality about which it speaks qualitatively, the being whose intrinsic fragrance it is, is a spiritual world towering high above everything corporeal."[29]

According to von Hildebrand, Mozart's sacred music, Raphael's *The Miraculous Draught of Fishes* (1515–1516) (Figure 6.3) and *Christ's Charge to Peter* (1515–1516) have "the same redeemed, sublime note, the same quality of mysterious holiness, the same quintessentially Catholic spirit."[30]

It is difficult to understand what "Catholic spirit" describes in this context. Are we to look for it in the muscular figures of Christ, disciples and fishermen hard at work on their nets, in the naturalistic rendering of the birds, the reflective, glassy surface of water or in the idyllic landscape? Is it expressed in the intensity of human emotion here captured in the dramatic gestures of the Apostles and Christ's calm response? What is distinctly Catholic about form in these paintings? Where exactly are redemption, sublimity and mysterious holiness to be seen? Is it in what we know about

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

the Gospel episodes? Or, in what we imagine is happening in the scenes that stand before us? Is it what we know or what we see?

The visual facts do not corroborate Hildebrand's statement. There is nothing mysterious in the atmosphere of the two paintings; nothing holy in the way that persons, animals and nature are depicted. We can certainly see attention, supplication, submission. We can observe chromatic symbolisms or analogies: the white cloak of Christ and the white sheep that follow him in *Christ's Charge to Peter* and the absence of that color from the clothes of the disciples. In the *Miraculous Draught*, Christ is in white and naturally that area of the composition stands out. But where exactly can we see the "redeemed, sublime note?" A group of animated, robust and well-groomed men are very much in this world. In fact, if anything stands out about them, it is their physical presence and that of their plush and colorful clothing. Sublimity too is hard to see. Usually this requires a visible tension in form, one that is conveyed, for example, through high tonality and contrast.

An iconographic standard is clearly implied in Hildebrand's description, but it is not clear what it consists of, at least not in an aesthetic sense. To anyone familiar with European art history, the works cited belong to a Catholic iconographic tradition and are recognizable as such. Familiarity with the events narrated and their theological significance can help make them even more meaningful. But the stories that these paintings condense in a singular incident are delivered in a manner that says more about the epoch in which they were painted than the spiritual realities that permeate them. Similarly, the author's statement conveys more about his sensibility (his love of sacred art and the Catholic tradition) than it does about the works that please it.

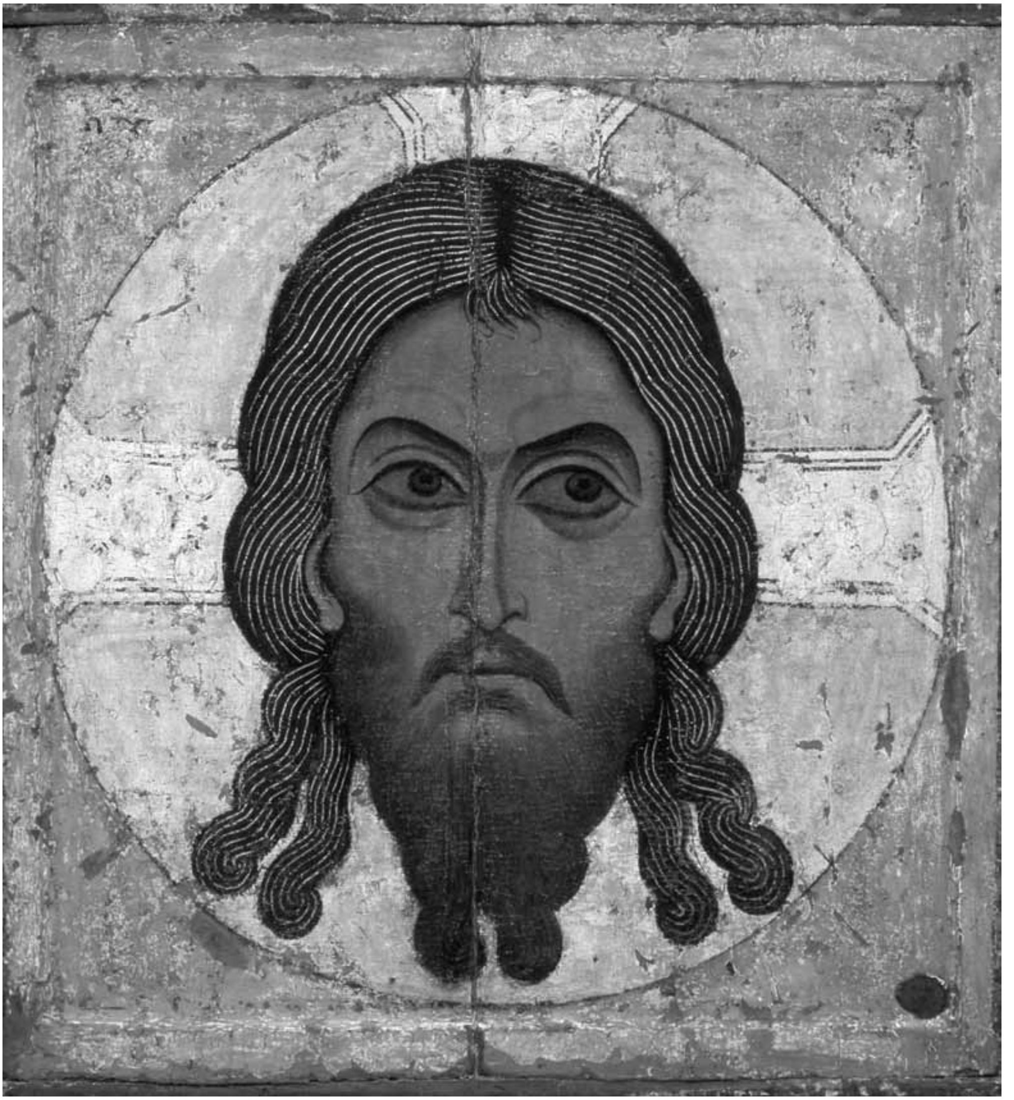
Let us turn now to how Orthodox theologians' approach Christian art. A good example is what Ouspensky and Lossky have written about the famous icon of *The Savior Acheiropoietos* (12th century) (Figure 6.4).[31]

> The grave and impassive expression of this visage of the God-Man has *nothing in common* with impassiveness of indifference towards the human world that one finds so often expressed in effigies created by the religious art of the Far East. Here, it is the *impassivity of an absolutely pure human nature*, which *excludes sin*, but *remains open to all the sorrows of the fallen world*. The large dilated eyes, turned towards the onlooker, have an attentive and saddened look which seems *to penetrate to the depths of consciences, without overwhelming them*: Christ is come into the world not to condemn, but to save it (John 3: 17) (emphasis added).[32]

There are a number of problematic assertions in this passage. Take for instance the claim that the icon depicts Christ's sinless human nature and

[31] Ouspensky and Lossky, p. 69. See also Alfredo Tradigo, *Icons and Saints of the Eastern Orthodox Church*, trans. Stephen Sartarelli (Los Angeles, 2006), p. 238.

[32] Ouspensky and Lossky, p. 72. Phrases which are difficult to substantiate in the icon are in italics.



6.4 *The Savior Acheiropoietos (Holy Face)*, 12th century,
Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia

openness to the sorrows of humanity. These qualities certainly belong to Christ by nature but before they are assigned to a picture they must be specified in visual terms. What makes a face look sinless, what kind of features and expression? How is that effect achieved by the aesthetic elements that constitute this particular image? The description does not really match the icon.

The man's face can at best be described as solemn and attentive, detached and remote, open and exposed. These qualities result from its flatness, frontal depiction, centered composition, stylized features and suspended head. To call it moral, spiritually pure and compassionate is an extrapolation. An association with the ascetical virtue of dispassion (*apatheia*) is possible but dispassion as such is not clearly visible in the face, particularly as the authors describe it.[33] Christ's gaze is neither penetrating nor sad in the depth and manner suggested. It may be a saving gaze to the viewer who associates it with salvation or who brings this idea to the image. Openness is present but it is a quality of the composition rather than of the face it depicts. Christ's face is actually quite emotionless. Openness to human sorrow, considered as a specific kind of openness consistent with empathy, is nowhere present. This is not an empathic or sad face. The dominant expression of the eyes and face is watchfulness (in Orthodox terminology *nepsis* that is, spiritual alertness or keeping vigilance with one's heart and mind). This is surely a *neptic* Christ. We can claim it with some confidence because we can actually *see* it.[34]

For Paul Evdokimov, as noted earlier, the Byzantine icon is the exemplary Christian image:

> The face of Christ is the human face of God. The Holy Spirit rests on him and reveals to us absolute Beauty, a divine-human Beauty that no art can ever properly and fully make visible. Only the icon can suggest such Beauty by means of the Taboric light.[35]

The existence of a kind of beauty that is unique to Christ is something the icon captures by its unique luminance. All icons, it seems, are capable of displaying this particular beauty and transcendent illumination. In so far as they embody these qualities, they cannot be classified as art. Like the Transfiguration on which they are modeled, they are instances of revelation.

Perhaps the most puzzling of these claims is that all icons convey the uncreated light manifested in Christ's Transfiguration. We must assume that

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33 *Apatheia* is defined in the *Philokalia*: "[for some] dispassion signifies passionlessness, the uprooting of the passions …, [for others] a state in which the passions are exercised in accordance with their original purity and so without committing sin in act or thought. Dispassion is a state of reintegration and spiritual freedom; when translating the term into Latin, Cassian rendered it 'unity of heart'." Palmer, Sherrard and Ware, p. 359.

34 *Nepsis* is defined in the *Philokalia*: "literally, the opposite to a state of drunken stupor; hence spiritual sobriety, alertness, vigilance. It signifies an attitude of attentiveness (*prosoche*) whereby one keeps watch over one's inward thoughts and fantasies (q.v.), maintaining guard over the heart and intellect (*phylaki kardias/nou-tirisis kardias/nou*)." Ibid., p. 367.

35 Evdokimov, pp. 289–298, 13, 87, 179.

they do this through the glowing qualities of gold leaf used in the background and halos of holy figures. Gold is a precious mineral with certain distinctive qualities. Like the silver "worn" by many miraculous icons, it reflects light and illuminates the figures it surrounds. This glowing effect, especially when observed in the proximity of lit candles, is indeed a good visual and conventional approximation of the presence of uncreated light in human experience. But to assign this quality to all icons by virtue of their golden background is to aestheticize an element of the image that may or may not be an integral part of its composition and plastic character. In most icons, for example, gold is not an aesthetically active part of the composition but a decorative element.

There are additional difficulties associated with the depiction of the theophanic vision. According to Orthodox theology, uncreated light does not belong to the order of created things. It is not a natural light (e.g., sunlight, candlelight) even though it can be seen under certain circumstances (see Chapters 13 and 14). Not only is a face illuminated by divine light a rare sight, but given the synergical nature of divine Grace, it may not be visible to the viewer who is not pure in heart and mind. An iconographer that strives for holiness and is immersed in the life and sacraments of the Church may see God, but an actual aesthetic translation of this sight is understandably not easy. It is therefore a mistake to assume that all icons succeed in such a difficult task and do so simply by placing their subjects against a golden background.

According to Evdokimov and others, icons are distinguished from works of art by their mystical lives. This extraordinary claim is never tested in an actual icon. The reason, as we have pointed out, is that according to most theological accounts a spiritual life is imparted or bestowed on an icon; it is not constituted in it. The same reasoning is applied to beauty which is in essence the reflection of uncreated light on created things, intensified in the case of the icon by its holy subjects (thus icons are doubly beautiful). This means that a very plain face which is neither radiant nor proportionate nor integrally structured can be beautiful in this transcendent sense. But since it is not by virtue of aesthetic qualities that it gets to be that way, it must come to this condition either by an act of divine intervention or simply by means of the icon's conformity to a canonical style. If the former is true, all icons are somehow miraculous in origin. If the latter is the answer, they are effectively scripted and seen *through* the structure imposed on them by a set of conventions. Combining the two options defines the icon as a stylized hieratic image on which is bestowed a charismatic (grace-filled) existence.

In his study of the icon, Leonid Ouspensky explains technical aspects of icon painting and identifies their theological basis. Gold is the most suitable medium for depicting divine light in icons, as it is both luminous and opaque.[36] The absence of perspective eliminates the viewer's vantage point and the illusion of reality it creates, and arranges objects frontally with their

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36 Ouspensky, p. 496.

surfaces open to the foreground of the image. Pointing forward and toward the world of the viewer, the icon brings an event or person which occurred or lived in the past forward to the present, where the viewer is situated. In this regard, according to Ouspensky, it assumes a liturgical, Eucharistic modality. Appropriately, the icon must be made of quality materials and be "authentic," true to its ecclesial vocation.[37]

Ouspensky wants us to see the icon's luminous background as a screen or veil that conceals the essence of God. Whereas God's energies made visible as light are open to human knowledge (*theognosia*)—Ouspensky quotes St. Symeon the New Theologian on this point—his essence remains hidden. Thus the icon is suspended between light and darkness:

> The radiance of gold symbolizes the divine glory. This is neither allegorism nor an unfounded imagery, but an expression that is quite adequate. Indeed, gold radiates light, but at the same time it is also opaque … what remains unutterable and inaccessible is the source itself, concealed by an impenetrable light-darkness … this particular feature of the background-light must be understood as a symbolic transposition of the very principle of apophatic theology—the ultimate impossibility of knowing the divine Essence.[38]

Icons are here presented as coded objects. They are fully legible to anyone who is familiar with Orthodox theology and its visual language. This esoteric vocabulary includes the physical qualities of luminance and opacity in gold without which an icon fails to signify divinity and holiness. Ouspensky is very clear on this point which links the material components of the icon with its theological signification: "The light is this divine energy; consequently, we can say that it is essential to the content of the icon. Indeed, it is the light that is the basis of its symbolic language."[39] Here the aesthetic object is irrelevant. It is due to this extra-aesthetic significance that the icon is deemed superior to Western religious art.

For Evdokimov, the icon is a locus of divine revelation and grace. For Ouspensky, it is a theological object that is symbolically constituted, an articulate messenger with an extraordinary mission: "to reveal the true relationships between God and man … to bring a testimony … of the reality of another way of life, of other norms of existential relationships brought about by the Incarnation and unknown to man enslaved by biological laws."[40] It is crafted with that purpose in mind, to "function as the artistic language of the Church."[41] The art object is transparent to the theologian because it speaks a language that he or she masters.

It should be clear by now that the theological treatment of the art object in both Catholicism and Orthodoxy is problematic. But in one important

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[37] Ibid., p. 499.
[38] Ibid., pp. 496–497.
[39] Ibid., p. 495.
[40] Ibid., p. 491.
[41] Ibid., p. 503.

aspect, the East may have a philosophical advantage: its adherence to the Patristic, hypostatic conception of the human person.[42] In the West, following Descartes, the human "subject" or consciousness has emerged as an invisible agent of intentional acts that are in need of externalization. This subject is contained within its own ratiocinated space. From there, as in a palindrome, it reaches out to the world by means of its imagination only to revert to itself driven by its autoscopic impulses. Art is incorporated in this trajectory which, as we have argued, undermines the integrity of the art object and transforms it into a construct of consciousness or, in the best case, of unconscious insights into the unitive relationship between mind and being. Jacques Maritain's aesthetics is a good example of how pervasive this disorientation can be and to his work we turn next.

[42] For the Orthodox conception of the human person in this context by a contemporary Greek theologian, see Loudovikos, *Orthodoxia*, pp. 61–103.

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Jacques Maritain's Dialogue with Modernism

A discussion of Christian iconography and Modernism is incomplete without an examination of the work of Jacques Maritain. Through his revival of Thomism, his significant influence on the Second Vatican Council, and his friendships with Modernist artists, Maritain emerged as the most authoritative Catholic voice to speak in defense of Modernist art.[1] At the same time, Maritain, as we have shown elsewhere, was well aware of the problems this encounter entailed.[2] He realized that not all Modernist works could be integrated in the spiritual life of the Church and he understood that the dialogue between the Church and contemporary art would not be easy. This is consistent with his overall approach to contemporary culture. When in 1965 he criticized the intrusion of rationalist and humanist ideas in conciliar theology, he earned the unusual distinction of being the philosopher (and aesthetician) of both progressive and conservative Catholicism.[3] No other philosopher, Catholic or Orthodox, has engaged artistic and cultural Modernism in the way that Maritain did.

Thus this chapter is as much an acknowledgment of his significant contribution to the study of the subject as it is an attempt to show where it went wrong. Maritain, in my view, paid too little attention to the expressive integrity of the art object and allowed his aesthetics to be overdetermined by the creative aspects of art. Thus, his aesthetics is essentially a spiritual

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1 Maritain's contribution was officially recognized by Pope John Paul VI. See Julie Kernan, *Our Friend, Jacques Maritain* (New York, 1975), pp. 165–166.

2 See C.A. Tsakiridou, "When Art Fails Humanity: Jacques Maritain on Jean Cocteau, Modernism and the Crisis of European Civilization," in Gavin Colvert (ed.), *The Renewal of Civilization: Essays in Honor of Jacques Maritain* (Washington D.C., 2010), pp. 152–173; and "Redeeming Modernism: Jacques Maritain and the Catholic Vocation," in John P. Hittinger (ed.), *The Vocation of the Catholic Philosopher: From Maritain to John Paul II* (Washington D.C., 2010), pp. 94–109.

3 See William B. Smith, *Jacques Maritain: Antimodern or Ultramodern: An Historical Analysis of His Critics, His Thought and His Life* (New York, 1976), pp. 21–28. Maritain argued that concepts of renewal embraced by the Council undermined Catholic teaching. Jacques Maritain, *The Peasant of the Garonne: An Old Layman Questions Himself about the Present Time*, trans. M. Cuddihy and E. Hughes (New York, 1968), p. 98.

epistemology of the creative subject which strives for redemption and transcendence through externalizing its intuitions.[4] Consciousness becomes creative as the artist struggles psychologically, in interior movements, to find personal integration (salvation) in unitive forms. There is an eschatological dimension to this process but it operates analogically as the artist, through this struggle, gets to know divine suffering and love.

Maritain interests us for three reasons, two of which relate directly to the intentional and affective fallacies. The first is his application of the Thomistic concept of connaturality to the creative process and the impact it has on construing the art object as an extension of unconscious intentional processes that incorporate portions of the world through the artist's emotional and spiritual involvement. This, as Maritain clearly acknowledges, creates an amalgam of subjective and objective realities which "calls forth in the manner of a sign."[5] The second is his attempt to justify Modernist art on that basis rather than on the actual qualities of the aesthetic object at hand. Instead of extending the concept of connaturality—and especially the notion that in it the subject is fitted to the world and the world to subject—to the art object as an independent entity, Maritain allows it to remain attached to its creator. This attachment undermines its expressive integrity. Finally, Maritain's ideas are especially relevant and instructive to contemporary theological debate in Greece about the future of the Byzantine icon.

I would like to start with the last point first, as it helps us appreciate the continuing relevance of Maritain's thought to the Christian engagement with contemporary art and culture. Here we can see a divergence and convergence of views between this thought and that of Greek scholars. The former concerns Maritain's commitment to Thomism as the perennial philosophy of Roman Catholicism. The latter concerns his significational view of the art object and the notion that its spiritual significance rests on this function.

While insisting on the icon's theological exceptionality and eschatological character, Greek theologians criticize its failure to express the religious experience and sensibility of the artist in a contemporary context. Maritain's problematic was similar but it had the advantage of using the rigorous philosophical method of Thomism and the benefit of his critical dialogue with Bergsonian philosophy.[6] By contrast, Greek theologians show little interest in the view of Orthodox tradition presented by Lossky and others.[7]

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[4] John G. Trapani Jr., *Poetry, Beauty and Contemplation: The Complete Aesthetics of Jacques Maritain* (Washington D.C., 2011), pp. 55, 40–52.

[5] Jacques Maritain. "On Knowledge through Connaturality," *The Review of Metaphysics*, 4 (June 1951): pp. 473–480. See also Thomas Ryan, S.M. "Revisiting Affective Knowledge and Connaturality in Aquinas," *Theological Studies*, 66 (2005): pp. 49–68.

[6] Trapani, *Poetry*, p. 39.

[7] On tradition and traditionalism in twentieth-century Greek iconography and the work of Fotis Kontoglou, see Loudovikos, *Orthodoxia*, pp. 347–355. On modernizers and traditionalists in the Greek Orthodox Church of America and the influence of Kontoglou on church iconography (i.e., the Church of the Holy Trinity in Charleston, North Carolina) in the second half of the twentieth century, see Kostas Baroutas, "Demetrios Doukas: Enas

Categories like "originality" and "authenticity" which in Orthodoxy, as we have seen, belong to realities (and objects) that reach deep within the mystical ground of tradition, are now sought in cultural norms and forces in which artists are supposed to find the new forms that will rekindle their creativity. According to Stamatis Skleres, for example, the icon is anachronistic and symptomatic of a "false Orthodoxy."[8] Skleres wants to replace "stereotypy" with "authenticity" in a move that is reminiscent of the Russian avant-gardes.[9] As he puts it, it is "civilization" rather than tradition that can give rise to new visual languages. The product of a now defunct civilization, the "Byzantine" style has lost its existential significance and truth.[10] The result is the absence of original compositions in iconography and the rehashing ("collage") of gestures, expressions, anatomical features etc. taken from older icons.[11]

For Skleres, innovation and originality are the outcomes of shifting paradigms which redefine artistic styles and give artists new opportunities for self-expression: "When authenticity comes, it will write a civilization even without the Byzantine script. Freedom cannot be contained to a singular visual language, because freedom means to write in a new alphabet and a new artistic vocabulary."[12] Like a metaphysical Absolute, Christ's theanthropy is "the ultimate originality" and the standard for all art. If the icon is to remain Orthodoxy's premier image, it cannot be predictable but "should always present us with a surprise."[13] Thus the aesthetic character of the icon is determined by the unique qualities of its archetypal subject. The icon must be original in its aesthetic form, to resemble Christ who was original in his divine humanity. Icons that remains confined within one style fail their exemplary subject, Christ. Since the only imperative imposed by Christ's Incarnation is originality, the iconographer is free to look for new styles in contemporary culture.

Here the Incarnation is the act of divine genius that created Christ, the ideal (and inimitable) work of art. Just as Christ is the prototype of Christian art by virtue of the act of genius that created him, so must the icon set its own rules by virtue of the genius of its iconographer. Thus the icon becomes the avant-garde image *par excellence*: it belongs to its times but also stands apart as a question mark or challenge to see the world and art differently. The Christian identity of a work of art lies in this critical relationship to cultural and aesthetic norms rather than in its aesthetic qualities. Its meaning is determined on the basis of the subjective and intersubjective realities that determine its creation

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Diakekrimenos Mathetes tou Foti Kontoglou" (Demetrios Doukas: A Distinguished Student of Fotis Kontoglou), *Synaxis*, 85 (January–March 2003): pp. 63–69.

8 Stamatis Skleres, "Eleuthere Demiourgia kia Antigraphe mesa sten Orthodoxe Eikonographike Paradose" (Free Creation and Imitation in the Orthodox Iconographic Tradition), *Synaxis*, 85 (Jan.–Mar. 2003): pp. 21–31.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

with an emphasis on the latter. By contrast, Maritain's turn to Thomism was an attempt to frame the dialogue with contemporary art and culture solidly in the Catholic philosophical tradition.

The views of Georgios Kordes emphasize the theological significance of aesthetic form in the icon. Kordes stresses its ecclesiastical and liturgical character, particularly its "sociocentric" role in perpetuating communion among the faithful.[14] In contrast to the sense of urgency that we get from Skleres and others, Kordes believes that "ecclesiastic art" is inherently capable of generating new forms.[15] How exactly this process will take place and what will define it is not clear. For Kordes, the icon's distinctive composition eliminates natural space and brings objects (in reverse perspective) out of their plane and into the viewer's physical and cognitive space.[16] This quality is applied uniformly to all icons and tied to their symbolic meaning. In this way, aesthetic qualities become theological metaphors. Visual rhythm, for example, is "that element, movement or breath, which can reconcile everything that appears within plastic form, and in so doing brings unity to the broken face of this world, creating an image filled with the elements of the coming Kingdom of Heaven."[17] The unqualified transition from aesthetic to theological meaning serves to remind us that the icon is a functional object. It is also a background against which eschatological concepts like redemption, restoration etc. can be outlined and contemplated.

By a combination of form and content and with the help of theological concepts, the icon becomes a theological signifier. It is also representational to the extent that it shows the world as we know it. Where relevant, abstraction is part of the theological idiom that ensures the icon's ecclesiastical conformity. This call for integral and recognizable content in the work of art, we also find in Maritain. In an attempt to accommodate abstract painting, Maritain opts for a moderate view of abstraction very different from that of Ouspensky who calls abstraction (of any kind) "alien" to Orthodoxy and dismisses modern art for its "chaotic innovations" and modern culture for its "incoherent novelties."[18] Non-representational painting, Maritain argues, cannot convey "the mystery of integral reality" that the artist senses through her "poetic intuition."[19] Abstraction that lacks the fundamental structure of experience

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[14] Georgios Kordes, "Proodos kai Paradose sten Orthodoxe Eikonographike Techne: H Theologia tou Rhythmou Odegos sto Pelagos tes Eikastikes Demiourgias" (Progress and Tradition in Orthodox Iconography: The Theology of Rhythm as a Guide to the Sea of Artistic Creation), *Synaxis*, 85 (Jan.–Mar. 2003): pp. 32–39.

[15] Ibid. See also Stelios Papalexandropoulos, "Pera apo to Byzantio, te Mimese kai te Demiourghia: Yia mia Xhristianike Eikonographia" (Beyond Byzantium, Imitation and Creation: Toward a Christian Iconography), *Synaxis*, 85 (Jan.–Mar. 2003): pp. 40–46.

[16] Kordes, "Proodos kai Paradose sten Orthodoxe Eikonographike Techne."

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ouspensky, p. 502.

[19] Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, Bollingen Series XXXV.1 (Princeton, 1953), p. 218.

and world "renounces seeing into the inner depths of the world of Nature, of visible and corporeal Being," and deprives art of its "poetry" and "beauty," the qualities that best "express the originality of the creative self."[20] Abstract paintings of this kind therefore "lack personality to such an extent that they can scarcely be distinguished from one another."[21]

The problem here is not the emphasis on figuration, but rather the definition of the work of art from the standpoint of the subjective processes that precede it. The recognition of artistic meaning is therefore experienced as a form of fittedness between world, image and subject in which the subject retains the principal role. Granted that this union of the three is essential to the creative process, once the work of art is finished, it projects its own identity. In other words, the representational trajectory ends where the work of art assumes an independent existence, where it emerges as a hypostatic being. Without this transition (and as long as it is not recognized), the work of art will remain a function of subjective and intersubjective agencies and powers. Inevitably then, one who approaches art in this manner will be drawn more to what artists say or write about their work than to what the works themselves communicate.

Maritain's assessment of Modernism is largely based on what Modernists wrote about their art and what they tried to express or achieve through it. Thus, when he discusses individual works, it is through the prism of the artists' statements, never on the basis of what the works show. Art object and idea are interchangeable and criticism of the ideas and intentions of the artist often replaces the direct study and criticism of his work. In the case of Malevich, for example, Maritain is critical of what the artist wrote about Suprematism and the role of feeling in art.[22] He describes Marcel Duchamp's paintings as "an attempt at integral transmutation" and tries to explain their underlying cognitive principles with no reference to specific works.[23]

Neither lucid nor precise in these and other examples, his writing favors the uniformity of the concept rather than the distinctiveness of the aesthetic object. Works are swept under categories, as if the objective is a conceptual history of art. Cubism "set out to transpose natural appearances by decomposing and reshaping them in reference to the free expansion of forms and volumes"; Futurism "attempted a similar transposition in reference to the lively shiftings and mutual interpenetration of visual impressions produced by motion."[24] It is ironic that this disregard for the art object comes from a critic of abstraction.

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[20] Ibid., pp. 218, 219–220.

[21] Ibid., p. 220.

[22] Ibid., pp. 216, 219.

[23] Two of Duchamp's works are reproduced in Maritain's text: *The Bride/Mariee* (1912) and *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912). Ibid., pp. 218–219, plates #46, 47.

[24] A number of Cubist, Surrealist, and Suprematist paintings are nevertheless reproduced. Ibid., pp. 212–213, 219–220.

Maritain delighted in art as we know from his numerous works on the subject, his friendships with prominent avant-garde artists, and from accounts of friends and intimates.[25] Starting with his seminal work on Thomistic aesthetics, *Art and Scholasticism* (1920/1962), Maritain tried to explain (and justify) avant-garde art in Thomistic terms and show that all great art is Christian in nature. He argued that art is the result of profound spiritual and existential crises and as such has a central role to play in human redemption. Redemptive creativity is the work of the divine subject. The artist works in the image of God to redeem self and world.[26] From the perspective of the creative self engaged in a struggle for meaning and unity, the boundaries between Christian and secular art are artificial.

The concept that Maritain used in order to explore the nature of the creative process is "poetic intuition." It is based on connaturality, a form of knowledge made possible by the fusion of cognitive and artistic form in the unconscious.[27] Connaturality has ethical, mystical and aesthetic qualities. In art, it is essentially a mysticism of (self) expression. Whereas the artist speaks through the work, the mystic speaks to herself, in silence (in "internal fruition").[28] Maritain defines the concept this way (with reference to virtue): "In this union through knowledge or inclination, connaturality or congeniality, the intellect is at play not alone, but together with affective inclinations and the dispositions of the will, and is guided and directed by them."[29] He then specifies its artistic form as follows: "Poetic knowledge is non-conceptual and non-rational knowledge; it is born in the pre-conscious life of the intellect, and it is essentially an obscure revelation both of the subjectivity of the poet and of some flash of reality coming together out of sleep in one single awakening."[30]

Being "knowledge in act," connaturality brings aspects of reality and self together in a single transcendental intuition mediated by emotion.[31] The application of this Thomistic concept in one of the most obscure areas of artistic activity is masterful. But Maritain, as we have pointed out, makes one crucial mistake. He does not allow the work of art to take full possession of

25 Trapani, *Poetry*, pp. 11–26.

26 In March of 1919 Raissa Maritain wrote in her diary that Georges Rouault and Cocteau have achieved "purity of intention." Catholic critics of modern art are ignorant, narrow-minded and "hard on artists"; a new art is needed to reflect "the full and luminous Catholic doctrine." Raissa Maritain, *Raissa's Journal: Presented by Jacques Maritain* (Albany, 1974), pp. 95–98. According to Maritain, Raissa's ideas influenced *Art and Scholasticism* and her notebook contained extensive comments on art that were not published. See also Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, p. 60.

27 Aquinas applies the term to moral knowledge. See Maritain, "On Knowledge through Connaturality." See also Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, pp. 111–134; *The Range of Reason* (New York, 1952), pp. 22–26. For other applications of this concept in the visual arts, see Tsakiridou, "The Connatural Eye."

28 Maritain, "On Knowledge through Connaturality."

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, p. 112.

itself, to become a separate being that internalizes (and even suffers) its own form.[32] As we observed earlier, it is the epistemology of art that concerns him most, not its ontology.

It may be objected that the absence of a programmatic act of consciousness in the originative, connatural moment has the opposite effect; that the artist, in other words, actually discovers the work before she discovers her self or discovers herself through the work. It is easy to see that this is not the case. Rather than eliminate the intentions of the agent, the esoteric nature of the act ensures that they will never be fully understood or deciphered and will therefore follow the work at all times. If the art object is genetically a mystery, its experience cannot be complete or be contained within its boundaries. A subject is always hiding inside and its elusive presence points somewhere outside the work, to an order of meaning that it cannot master. As with Plato's inferior images, the painting carries a trace of an archetype whose full form it can never capture. Only now this is subjectively posited. It occupies an ideal place deep inside the artist's experience, being at once a remote and intimate reality. Here the work cannot be its own person but belongs inadvertently to the temporality of its maker. What is trans-temporal about it must be sought in the horizon of this creative impulse that belongs, Maritain claims, to all human beings irrespective of religion and culture.

Maritain may have never intended this outcome which follows directly from the determination of connaturality as an epistemic act that affects the subject and through it the work. By contrast, it is possible, as we have shown in the case of photography, for connaturality to characterize the work of art, to belong, in other words, to its inherent and independent (from the subject) existence.[33] Thus, even though the presence of certain ineffable subjective elements in artistic form is undeniable, we can see them as inextricably tied to its aesthetic qualities and dynamics. The greater their depth and complexity, the more the work resonates with its own peculiar personhood. In this objective (aesthetic) connaturality, habits of the mind and habits of the world fuse and become a new reality, a new being. The elements involved in these formative moments are therefore intelligible within the context supplied by the art object; in fact, they *are* the art object. This identity is an aesthetic-intentional reality. Despite its genetic connection to a subject and its interior life, the work eventually enters an objective existence and communicates the world it embodies rather than the world that made it possible. It is in this position and to the extent that it exists by positing its own reality, in a present rather than a past or future tense, that it resists the structures of historicity (the Hegelian reduction). The recollecting subject cannot reclaim it, no matter what authority it invokes.

For Maritain, the work of art arises out of the expressive struggle of a subject whose intuitions overflow with transcendental significance. This

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32 Von Hildebrand, *The New Tower*, p. 183 #1.

33 Tsakiridou, "The Connatural Eye."

esoteric contact with the world is mediated and sustained by divine love. Creation is an act and expression of this love for the world and the self. The projection of divine love continues in the art object. The formative intuitions that define the creative process can be "fully expressed only in the work," but once there, they continue their interior life.[34] The only difference is that they now exist as signs. The work's "spiritual depth" is not an aesthetic reality but a semantic one. Characterized by "an infinite openness to the richness of being," informed "with infinite horizons" and overflowing with meanings, the art object exists in a state of expressive rupture.[35]

With these ideas, Maritain is opening the work of art to unqualified polysemy and relativism. Expressively explosive, the art object is unconfined by form, incapable of containing its own sense and resting in its own reality. Open-ended in signification, burdened with unspecified meanings and imbued with mystifying powers, it risks collapsing under the weight of a significance that it does not really possess. Thus we read:

> … it (the work) is a sign—both a *direct sign* of the secrets perceived in things, of some irrecusable truth of nature or adventure caught in the great universe, and a reversed sign of the subjective universe of the poet, of his substantial Self obscurely revealed. Just as things grasped by poetic intuition abound in significance, just as being swarms with signs, so the work also will swarm with meaning and will say more than it is, and will deliver to the mind at one stroke, the universe in a human countenance.[36]

There is little in this *ekphrastic* passage that is of actual aesthetic relevance; that we can demonstrate, in other words, aesthetically, right in the art object itself. Idealized in a way that makes it difficult for one to grasp, the work of art is an arcane object with supernatural powers, a place where world and self are ever intimated but never found, and where the cosmic mystery of life remains ciphered. It is everything else but itself. As we have seen in so many examples (from Goncharova to Florensky, to Evdokimov and Gilson), theological and metaphysical claims of this magnitude are never grounded in a work's aesthetic reality. Even though they are associated with the art object, they are never part of its aesthetic being.

Nothing in this passage helps us distinguish the Christian image from its Buddhist or Hindu equivalent. All works of art, for example, to the extent that they are made by a thinking being and are in one form or another about something, can show "the universe in a human countenance." And something of "the subjective universe of the poet," is reflected in every work of art. However, what matters from an aesthetic point of view is not the fact that the art object suggests humanity and subjectivity. It is, rather, a question of modality, of *how* this object (which is so rich, according to Maritain) goes about communicating these meanings aesthetically and in a Christian way.

34 Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, p. 118.
35 Ibid., pp. 126–127.
36 Ibid., p. 128.

This lack of attention to the aesthetic object and its particularity is typical of Maritain's approach. When he writes that "after the 'liberation' accomplished in modern times" painting will attain "to a kind of metaphysical vastness," one wonders how a work can actually accomplish this feat and whether this is an endorsement of non-representational art or of the kind of art that denies (or questions) its own conditions of existence as a plastic object (i.e., the premise of Postmodernism).[37]

But the most problematic aspect of Maritain's aesthetics is his intentional definition of aesthetic meaning: "the first condition necessary for such judgment is a kind of *prior consent to the artist's general intentions and to the creative perspective in which he has placed himself* (emphasis added)."[38] In another passage he writes:

> art will be Christian, and will reveal in its beauty the interior reflection of the radiance of grace, *only if it overflows from a heart suffused by grace* … the quality of the work is here the *reflection of the love from which it issues*, and which moves the virtue of art instrumentally (emphasis added).[39]

The role of the subject becomes even more central and radical here:

> They [modern artists] have understood—and sometimes at a terrible cost—that the first duty of the artist and the poet is to be unshakably faithful to their own truth, to the individual and incommunicable truth about themselves and about things, which is obscurely revealed to them and which must take shape in their work (emphasis added).[40]

So many of the errors already identified are present in these examples: the intentional fallacy, the supernatural determination of art (here mediated by love), and the Romantic view that gives the artist a nearly solipsistic and messianic role in the advance of art and civilization—a notion that Modernists found so attractive. This explains why Maritain was repeatedly drawn to avant-gardes who became converts to Catholicism and how he came to see in their work proof of the validity of his argument. The idea of the artist as an *alter Christus*—a role that his friend Jean Cocteau consciously embraced—is the prism through which he saw not only the artist but also his art.[41]

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[37] Ibid., pp. 130–131.

[38] Maritain, *The Range of Reason*, p. 20.

[39] Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, p. 67. I come to a different conclusion in my "*Vera Icona*: Reflections on the Mystical Aesthetics of Jacques Maritain and the Byzantine Icon," in John G. Trapani, Jr. (ed.), *Truth Matters: Essays in Honor of Jacques Maritain* (Washington D.C., 2004), pp. 224–246.

[40] Maritain, *The Range of Reason*, p. 20.

[41] Cocteau liked to compare himself to Christ and present his conversion as a form of Passion. Jacques and Raissa saw this as a sign of his genuine return to Catholicism. Christ was also a favorite celebrity persona for Salvador Dali: "He [Christ] loved publicity, just like Dali. He certainly beat me at it because he managed to have himself cuckolded, only in order to force people to remember him. He completely succeeded, but religiously he was a nonentity!" Jacques Maritain, *Art and Faith: Letters between Jacques Maritain and Jean Cocteau*, trans. John Coleman (New York, 1948), pp. 46, 68, 37, 38, 41. See also Raissa Maritain, p. 182;

Maritain's aesthetics helps us appreciate better the philosophical roots of the ambiguities that characterize the views expressed in conciliar documents about art and in the writings of Rome's most distinguished theologians.[42] The solution he offers to the Catholic encounter with contemporary culture remains intriguing but also risky since it lacks the discrimination needed to counteract the contemporary tendency to see distinct religious and artistic traditions as variations on a common idea or set of principles. This is evident when he proposes the Thomistic view of the work of art as the universal paradigm for art: "Wherever art—Egyptian, Greek or Chinese—has known a certain degree of grandeur and purity, it is already Christian, Christian in hope, because every spiritual radiance is a promise and a symbol of the divine harmonies of the Gospel."[43] This parallels his notion that mystical experience is universal and that intuitions of Christ are possible in many religions.[44] Christ is present in the suffering of a Muslim mystic or in the experience of radical love between human beings. Similarly, any work of art that conveys transcendent realities is Christian.

It is difficult to believe that all it takes for an Egyptian statue from the middle of the third millennium or a thirteenth-century Chinese scroll-painting to be integrated in the universe of Christian art is radiant form.[45] From Maritain's perspective, where form shines, Christ is present. Where Christ is present, form shines. But what exactly does this "spiritual radiance" consist of and how can a Ch'an painting suggest the truths of the Gospel or the view of a world created by a personal God that is absent in Buddhism?

The exemplary Christian image and the Buddhist image that stands as an aesthetic moment of enlightenment do have, as we have seen, certain qualities in common (more in Chapter 15). But they do not have them in the same modality. Even if we were to think of family resemblance in this case, differences are essential since that is how resemblance is established. From the vantage point of his subjectivist aesthetics, Maritain understandably wants unconditional unity and the spiritual and aesthetic supremacy of the Christian (Catholic) image. This recalls the aspirations of Evdokimov and Ouspensky about the Byzantine icon and echoes Modernist dreams about a universally spiritual art. But it fails for the same reason. It does not allow the art object to make the claim directly. Such confidence art deserves.

There is, finally, a tacit Hegelianism in Maritain that becomes obvious when he defines Oriental art by its interest in nature (a characteristic also

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Alain Bosquet, *Conversations with Dali*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York, 1969), pp. 83–84, 59.

[42] For a discussion of Maritain's impact on Vatican II and his rejection of certain Modernist trends in theology in his 1965 book, *The Peasant of the Garonne*, see Smith.

[43] Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, pp. 65–66; Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, plates 1–8.

[44] Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan (Notre Dame, 1995), p. 7.

[45] I am referring to *Nen-Khefet-Ka and His Wife Nefer-Shemes*, Oriental Institute University of Chicago. The work *Fishermen*, by Wu Chen (1280–1354), is shown in Siren, p. 108.

of Greek art which he puts in the same category) and Occidental art by its interest in the self.[46] No matter how appealing in its power to integrate, this kind of conceptual history does not measure up to the reality of the individual work. And it also creates systemic inconsistencies. Thus the distinction drawn here is at odds with his core thesis that self and reality exist connaturally in the poetic intuition. Similarly when he argues that "[Chinese art] remains, nevertheless, dominated by the supremacy of Things over the human Self which characterizes Oriental art in general," it is unclear how this view can be reconciled with the notion that all art is ultimately subsumed under Christ, the universal and absolute subject.[47] If this is the crucial truth of all art, then it matters little whether a work belongs to the Oriental or Occidental type. And the distinctions themselves become largely rhetorical. What does it mean, for instance, in concrete aesthetic terms to say, as Maritain does, that the Byzantine icon is "so close, in one sense, to Oriental art, though freer from Things—with its glorious and royal, not suffering Christs?"[48]

These rather superficial observations are consistent with the positing of a transcendental subjectivity on the other side of the work of art. Whether it is Christ, the model of the suffering artist, or the Romantic self that converts beings into signs of its own ineffable existence, the aesthetic object is never what it appears to be. It is part of a great anthropological drama, a sign of human greatness and grandeur, and a mirror to our spiritual adventures. Works of art "make present to us the spirit of those unknown men who drew them, they tell us that their makers were men, they reveal a creative *Self* endowed with immortal intelligence, pursuing deliberately willed ends, and capable of sensing beauty (emphasis added)."[49]

Maritain's idea that in order to integrate avant-garde art in Christianity we must situate behind the art object a Christian subject that consciously or unconsciously strives to express the inexpressible, was in part a Thomist's solution. Aquinas' definition of beauty as an intellective experience where mind and object match and their union pleases (*id quod visum placet*) implies, on the creative side, a genealogy of unitive moments between consciousness and world that is mediated by divine love. This is the path that Maritain followed. If the work of art is experienced mentally, as the realization of concepts in sensuous form, its inception must follow a similar trajectory. But here, because the concept is sensuous and the mind deals directly with sensibles, ideas are experienced intuitively—similar to the aesthetical ideas of Kant. Otherwise they cannot be aesthetic or make art. Since what is intuited is inexpressible, this failure of the concept—its regression into form and feeling—in the presence of the sensible becomes a mystical act that allows the intellect direct,

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46 Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, pp. 20–21.

47 Ibid., pp. 32–33.

48 Ibid., p. 22. See also Jacques Maritain, *On the Grace and Humanity of Jesus*, trans. Joseph W. Evans (New York, 1969), pp. 30–34.

49 Ibid., p. 34.

non-discursive perception.[50] It is this connatural, Incarnational, moment that is the foundation of art's spiritual nature and the basis of Maritain's claim that all art is spiritual and Christian.

Thus, the artist suffers her intuition until she incarnates it mentally, an act not possible without divine grace and love. There is a parallel between what the artist knows and what the mystic experiences, as Maritain explains in his essay on connaturality: "For the spiritual man … knows divine things through inclination or connaturality; not only because he has learned them, but, as the Pseudo-Dionysius put it, because he suffers them."[51] It is because the mystic loves that he comes to know things directly, "obscurely uniting the intellect with the thing known."[52] The same happens to Maritain's artist-mystic. Once love enters the process, what is a mere conceptual failure becomes a perpetual redemption and fruition of the intellective act in countless signs that "swarm" the work of art with meaning.

For Maritain, love is the catalyst. When it is "received in the preconscious life of the intellect, [it] becomes intentional and intuitive, and causes the intellect obscurely to grasp some existential reality as one with the Self it has moved, and by the same stroke all that which this reality, emotionally grasped, calls forth in the manner of a sign."[53] Feelings attune the intellect to the world. The traces (signs) of this primal form of knowledge create art in the artist and rupture in the mystic. But the swarming meanings of the work of art are very different from the mystic's silent locutions. The art object never really possesses them as the mystic possesses his. Instead, it is reconfigured every time the question of its meaning arises or its origins are sought in some intentional act or affective state.

Thus, in Maritain the freedom of the work of art lies in its fluid identity and openness to perpetual redefinition, and reflects its cognitional origins rather than its aesthetic existence. Its mystery is not that of a *sui generis* being but of a puzzle. By contrast, the *enargeic* image combines in its own act of (aesthetic) existence the expressive, creative qualities that Maritain attributes to art with the interior unity that he assigns to the spiritual life. The combination of expressivity and unity is consistent with the emphasis placed in Orthodox theology on an existential, ascetical spirituality that is not defined by intense intellective and affective movements and interior ruptures. The Orthodox *visio dei* is experienced as an ontological transformation and perfection of one's being. This perfection belongs to things (and to the *hesychast*) by virtue of an act of charismatic existence in which they fully partake without shedding their finite natures. Art is no exception.

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[50] For a critical view of this position and Maritain's reading of Aquinas, see Umberto Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Hugh Bredin (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 60–63.

[51] Maritain, "On Knowledge through Connaturality."

[52] Maritain is referring to John of St. Thomas. Ibid.

[53] Maritain, "On Knowledge through Connaturality."

PART III

ORTHODOX ICONOLOGY

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Asceticism and Iconoclasm

In this section we look for the *enargic* image in the manuals of desert asceticism, the writings of the Greek Fathers, in Iconodule literature and in the *ekphraseis* composed by Byzantine literati and churchmen. Ascetics warn us that interest in physical and mental images is an obstacle to salvation—a notion that seems to justify their banishment from Christian life and thus the position endorsed by Byzantine Iconoclasm. Yet, asceticism was not opposed to art. It was opposed fiercely to what the passions made of it. Byzantine theologians endorsed this view, as we shall see in the case of St. Diadochus of Photiki, but did so without abandoning a Hellenic sensibility that was attuned to the intricacies of painting and art and their vivid expression in writing and speech. The extent to which this sensibility found expression in Byzantine theology is the question that we will try to answer in the following chapters.

The use of images to state theological truths and establish the historical reality of holy beings is Christianity's way of affirming the Incarnation of the divine *Logos*. *Logos* expresses itself creatively in images and figures of all kinds. Icons of Christ are dissimilar to their divine original but glimmer with divinity and draw the viewer to a world that lies beyond their physical form. As in the *acheiropoeitai*, where the figure of a holy person emerges spontaneously and immediately establishes itself as life and art, every holy image resonates with the divine and signifies its presence and existence.[1]

The old Platonic and Plotinean notion of images as simulations of being and unreal to the point of evil is held by St. Neilus the Ascetic

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[1] Also known as *theoteuktai* (drafted with divine hands), *agraphae* (unpainted or unwritten) or *hylographoumenai* (written on matter), they became popular in the sixth century on the precedent of venerated pagan images believed to be of heavenly origin. See Belting, pp. 495–498. See also Mango, *The Art*, p. 153. Extant *acheiropoietai* include the *Sancta Sanctorum* icon of Christ, Rome (c. 600), the *Salus Populi Romani* icon in S. Maria Maggiore, Rome (sixth century), attributed to St. Luke, the myrrh streaming *Panagia Vlahernon* in St. Nicholas Monastery, Andros, Greece, and the bleeding *Panagia Portaitissa* (Keeper of the Gate) icon at Iviron Monastery, Mount Athos, among others. See for example Belting, pp. 194–197, 57–73, 495–496; Edward James Martin, *A History of the Iconoclastic Controversy* (New York, 1978), pp. 21–23.

(d. c. 340) and other Desert Fathers, though it is probably meant for novices.[2] It conveys accurately the influence of Greek philosophy on the Christian mind and on Christian art. According to Georges Florovsky, Iconoclasm was not an Oriental phenomenon. It was rather a "split in Hellenism," the result of a confrontation between the Hellenistic spirit of Platonism—Christianized by Origen—and a "Hellenized Christianity" that eventually established the image as a historical witness.[3] Opponents and defenders of images were using Platonic concepts in their iconology (e.g., transcendent archetypes, defective copies), as we shall have occasion to see in St. John Damascene.[4] Origenism had a lasting influence on Orthodox theologians including Maximus who in *Centuries on Theology* assigns to Christ's mystical appearances different forms according to the spiritual level of the perceiver.[5] Maximus knew that images and sensibles can function apophatically, as they do in Areopagite thought, but his theology finds this view too restrictive. In asceticism and theophany beings enter and taste the life of perfection. Theophany becomes ontophany, the epiphany and restoration of being. The legacy of Platonism on Christian thought fades away.

Egyptian and Palestinian desert asceticism embraced the notion that visual objects (both external and internal) are an obstacle to the intellect's (*nous*) ascent to God. By their presence and visceral power, images keep one's mind attached to the world, to desires formed by past experience, and to the memories that revive them. The idea goes back to Plato's explanation in the *Philebus* (39de–40ab) that the soul is like a tablet that contains "written words" (*grammata*) and "pictures or images" (*zographemata*, *eikones*). Stored in memory, they come alive in the imagination (*phantasmata ezographemena*). Their activation there elicits intense and vivid pleasures (*hedonae*). In the good soul, good fantasies arise; in the bad, bad. Fantasies are mental constructs that make use of sense impressions to deceive and mislead us.

The Desert Fathers agree. Mental images are rooted in the senses and since perception is their foundation, the guarding of the soul should start there. In this mental iconoclasm, interior images that are mainly but not exclusively charged to the imagination are to be eliminated. If interior images must be contained and removed, so must exterior images, particularly since in the process of internalizing them the senses take on a creative function. The Desert Fathers were not aestheticians. But their ideas have aesthetic implications. In the desert, sensuous forms must be left behind and the soul turned inward. St. Isaiah the Solitary (late fourth or fifth century): "The

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[2] Termed *eikon*, *eikasia* and *mimesis*, in Rep. 509e, 598e–599a. In Plotinus the sensuous and material world is the domain of semblances, non-existence and in its penultimate form, evil, in *Ennead* I. 8. 3 (*kakon … eikon tou ontos e kai eti mallon me on*).

[3] Georges Florovsky, *Christianity and Culture (Collected Works, Vol. 2)* (Belmont, 1974), vol. 2, pp. 118–119.

[4] Ibid., 118.

[5] Ibid., pp. 113–114. PG90:1129–1132.

monk should shut all the gates of his soul, that is, the senses, so that he is not lured astray."[6] And Evagrius Ponticos (the Solitary, c. 345–399): "If the intellect has not risen above the contemplation of the created world, it has not yet beheld the realm of God perfectly."[7]

Visualization, particularly of God in prayer, is explicitly forbidden by Evagrius, and images are treated as "impressions" which become engrained in the mind and are difficult to extract or remove—a notion with which Plato would agree. "When you are praying, do not shape within yourself any image of the Deity, and do not let your intellect be stamped with the impress of any form."[8] "Never try to see a form or shape during prayer." "Do not long to have a sensory image of angels or powers of Christ, for this would be madness: it would be to take a wolf as your shepherd and to worship your enemies, the demons."[9] It is not clear here whether it is the desire for visualization that makes an image harmful or the image itself, or both. The effort to picture Christ, for example, may lead one to delusions and make her susceptible to demonic intervention.

Pure prayer is insensible prayer. Intellectual purity results from the total removal of sense impressions. The result is an intellect open and receptive to the Holy Spirit. Total detachment from the body in terms of external sensations leads to the vigilant observation of one's interior sensate life until total purgation is achieved. Since in the desert encounters with external visual objects are drastically reduced, and with them the possibility of physical temptations, it is in the interior space of the intellect that a variety of demonic beings take on sensible form, mostly as lions, serpents and other animals but also as angels, in order to provoke intense sensual and affective reactions.[10] This can explain the need to eliminate all images as a practical solution to the novice's problem (since he or she does not yet have the requisite discernment).

Nepsis, the guarding of the mind from this kind of interior assault—either self-caused or initiated by demons, or both—requires that images be expelled from the intellect at the very moment that they arise. Thus, St. Mark the Ascetic (early fifth century) warns: "Once our thoughts are accompanied by images we have already given them our assent; for a provocation does not involve us in guilt so long as it is not accompanied by images. Some people flee away from these thoughts like 'a brand plucked out of the fire' (Zech. 3:2) …."[11]

The distinction between a thought and an image suggests that the latter is a more tangible and affectively charged object, particularly in libidinal terms. As in Evagrius, the longer images remain within the intellect the more somatic they become, and the more difficult their excision. This is why

6 Palmer, Sherrard and Ware, vol. 1, p. 23 (7); numbered paragraphs where available are indicated in parentheses.

7 Ibid., p. 62 (58). Paragraph numbers are in parentheses.

8 Ibid., p. 63 (67).

9 Ibid., p. 68 (114, 115).

10 Ibid., pp. 67–68 (106–112).

11 Ibid., pp. 119–120 (141).

nepsis is the vigilant attentiveness and readiness for action the moment the intellect or the heart move with desire toward an external or internal object. A repertory of internalized, embodied images creates a predisposition to sin by functioning as a matrix in which newly acquired images are inserted and activated viscerally and physically: "Images already established in our intellect are more pernicious and stubborn than those which arise while we are thinking. The latter precede the former as their cause."[12]

When successful, *nepsis* is accompanied by *hesychia* or stillness, the arrest of physical activities and of intellective movements that involve visualization even of the slightest distracting content: "The intellect cannot be still unless the body is still also; and the wall between them cannot be demolished without stillness and prayer."[13] By contrast, the words of Christ are welcomed into the intellect and contrary to images which result in confusion and stupefaction, have an empowering and animating impact on it. Some exceptions are finally made for visualizing certain vices in order to enhance vigilance against them, using types derived from Scripture e.g., the Philistine giants in Judith 2:4.[14]

Generally, mental images easily become extensions of desires that fuel the passions and in this respect they have a psychokinetic character that explains their intrusive, penetrating and staying power. Habits of visualization relating to sexual fantasies are especially dangerous. Neilus the Ascetic:

> if he constantly allows these images to force their way into his intellect and does not bar their entry, the passions will once more establish themselves within him; … we must not allow our soul to form the habit of taking pleasure in fantasies of this kind, and so to relapse into its previous wickedness.[15]

Since images are employed by demonic beings which charge them with their own malicious designs, they are rarely what they appear to be, as they are ciphered into signs intended to disorient and deceive the intellect.

Thus, it is not only their presence that causes alarm but also the contrived meanings they convey. These the experienced ascetic is supposed to discern and diagnose correctly, as would a skilled semiotician. "This means that we should learn to detect the attack of deceitful thoughts from premonitory signs and to watch their first beginnings, which they contrive to make attractive in appearance so as to attain their end."[16] Since this is by no means an easy task, novices in particular are advised to avoid movements of the intellect that add new images to its repertory: "those who have only recently escaped from the agitation of the world should be advised to practice stillness; … They should take care not to add new images to their old fantasies."[17] This is a form of visual fasting.

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12 Ibid., p. 122 (182).
13 Ibid., p. 128 (31).
14 Ibid., pp. 158–159.
15 Ibid., p. 225.
16 Ibid., p. 226.
17 Ibid., p. 230.

The association of interior images (particularly of objects linked to pleasure and power) with idolatry, and the notion that idolatry and iconolatry (interior images) envelop the soul in lies and illusory preoccupations, is explained by Neilus in a manner that recalls Plato's *Philebus*:

> Wealth, fame and the other things of this life all lack substance, for there is nothing clear and distinct about them. They possess a specious resemblance to reality, but change from day to day. We ourselves give them substance when in our thoughts we shape fantasies about things that serve no real purpose.

And he adds: "we rightly spoke of such a soul as 'sitting on idols'."[18]

For Neilus, images draw their power from their psychic intimacy and the energy that emotion, appetite and desire invest in them. Thus, they become more powerful than the objects they depict and can actually impart on them, through representation, realities that they do not intrinsically possess. It is a psychologically astute view and one that the monastic and anchorite traditions have consistently embraced. Careful (vigilant) observation of mental states and examination of thoughts (*logismoi*) to detect the presence of improper images and ideas (especially in the context of confession), was and remains the staple of Orthodox spirituality.

The unreality of imaginary objects is based on the juxtaposition of two irreconcilable worlds: one invisible and spiritual and the other visible and physical. It is to the latter that formidable and corruptive attachments are formed. The possibility of a middle ground is inconceivable, at least for the novice who lacks the discernment imparted by grace. Emphasis is repeatedly given to the "ugliness of matter," an ugliness that we fail to perceive because "we are fooled by our attachment to it."[19] The ascetic strives to have a dispassionate relationship (*apatheia*) to all things sensible that are associated with desire and pleasure. It is meant to lead the intellect to a direct vision of spiritual realities while empowering it to act as the soul's protective shield against all kinds of iconic beings that seek entrance in it.

The discernment of temptations and the ascetic's conflicted relationship with images is eloquently developed in the writings of St. Diadochus of Photiki, a bishop in Northern Epirus Greece and younger contemporary of Neilus, whose influence on Maximus will become evident later. His work *On Spiritual Knowledge and Discrimination: One Hundred Texts* shows parallels to the writings of St. Mark the Ascetic, the fifth-century monk and hermit (Palestine, Syria) who, like Neilus, is associated with Asia Minor (Ankyra).[20] It shows how consistent the desert and city asceticism were on this subject but it also provides a good example of the existence in Orthodox ascetic theology of a strong undercurrent of aesthetic appreciation and interest in art.

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18 Ibid., p. 237.
19 Ibid., p. 245.
20 Ibid., p. 109.

Like the Desert Fathers, Diadochus wanted to empty the intellect of its worldly objects and affections but not in an intellectual, theoretical sense. His was not a philosopher's endeavor. It was on the contrary, a way of life, one in which the entire person was involved in fasting and prayer, vigils and sacraments, repentance and confession. The ascetics did find images dangerous to their prayer life and struggle for purification but theirs was essentially a practical and contained opposition to images, defined by the ultimate goal of the ascetic life, deification and theophany. When this practical dimension was overlooked, as it probably was among the learned (Hellenizing) bishops that supported Iconoclasm, what was a means of spiritual perfection became a potent ideological instrument.[21]

For Diadochus, asceticism is the process by which we strive to "refine our material nature" (*leptynomen*), in order to arrive gradually to "immaterial perception" (*aylou aistheseos*).[22] The senses (*aistheseis*) propel us to visible objects and the intellect (*nous*) to invisible (*aorata*). The more one "tastes" (*geuetai*) the divine grace, the less the violence (*viaios*) that the senses can do to the soul. Thus perception is transformed by a supernatural act, aided by the ascetic's persistent struggle to resist the natural inclination to form images and be driven by them. The concept of violence in this context suggests the disruption and re-orientation of the intellect, something that asceticism promises to reverse by bringing the mind to a state of restful tranquility or peace (*eirene anapauein*).[23] It follows that the more disorderly the intellect, the richer its imaginal life, the greater the number of images it has to receive and sort out.

Keeping the mind tranquil is therefore pivotal and the key to enhancing one's ability to repel and discriminate incoming images. For Diadochus, divine illumination enhances tranquility. The more light is shed on the intellect, the less its movement, the fewer the images it entertains. Total tranquility, he writes in another chapter, comes only after the complete purification and illumination (*lampados*) of the intellect which is the work of the Holy Spirit: "Only the Holy Spirit can purify the intellect."[24] Thus asceticism gradually transforms the imaginal landscape of the mind and ultimately brings it to a state of lucidity, order and spiritual discernment. The divine light illuminates all areas of the intellect and in the process identifies and dissolves even minute remnants of demonic incursions and their objects:

> when it [the lamp of spiritual knowledge (*lychnos gnoseos*)] is shining constantly in the inner shrine of the soul, not only will the intellect perceive all (*katadeloi*) the dark and bitter attacks of the demons, but these attacks will be greatly

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[21] Florovsky, *Christianity and Culture*, pp. 109–110.

[22] Palmer, Sherrard and Ware, vol. 1, p. 259 (24). The Greek text is from Diadoque de Photicé, *Oeuvres Spirituelles*, trans. Édouard des Places (Paris, 1966). See also Theokletos Dionysiates, *Tou Aghiou Diadochou tes Photikes: Ta Ekato Gnostika Kephalaia* (*The One Hundred Chapters on Knowledge*) (Thessaloniki, 1999).

[23] Palmer, Sherrard and Ware, vol. 1, p. 260 (28).

[24] Ibid.

weakened (*exasthenousi*) when exposed for what they are (*elenchomenai*)
by that glorious and holy light.[25]

The presence of the Holy Spirit fills the soul with love for God. It frees the intellect from its sensuous inclinations and attachments and replaces them with spiritual movements: "sometimes the soul is kindled into love for God and, free from all fantasy and image, moves untroubled by doubt toward Him."[26] New sensations unrelated to physical objects or to their memory now fill the soul. To be sure, the possibility of deception still exists and the presence of the demonic powers is felt as "bitterness" (*pikrias*) in one's intellect and heart.[27] Grace permeates every part of the intellect, and like a flashlight in a dark chamber reveals undisclosed corners and locations (*eis to vathos tou nou kateskenonetai*) in which "uninterrupted" (*anendoto*) "joy" (*chara*) and "sweetness" (*glyketetos*) now dwell.[28] Diadochus is here touching on an idea that we will find developed in Maximus, the notion that grace brings beings to a state of plenitude and fulfillment. Here, the perfected intellect's fullness contrasts with the shallow perceptions of the ordinary mind.

Diadochus is careful to point out that God himself is not visible in any way. To be precise—and here we may have an important difference from Maximus and later Symeon and the theophanic tradition—the divine "glory" (*doxan*) is utterly invisible (*medeis … oratos doxan tou Theou opthenai*).[29] Thus we cannot see God in any shape or form, no matter how abstract. In fact, Diadochus attributes even the slightest sight of light or fire—"light or some fiery form" (*phos e schema ti pyroeides*)—or any kind of "vision" (*orama*) to demonic interference.[30]

There are, however, occasions when it is possible to see images of divine origin. This occurs in dreams and other interiorly formed images, that are not the result of demonic ploys but the result of "God's love" (*te agape tou Theou*)—signs of a "healthy soul" (*hygiainouses psysches*) distinguished by their constancy and coherence.[31] These "dreams do not change (*metavalontai*) from one shape to another; they do not shock our inward sense, resound with laughter or suddenly become threatening. But with great gentleness they approach the soul and fill it with spiritual gladness (*pneumatikes thumedias*)."[32] Subtlety of form and an experience of delight characterize these visions and help us distinguish them from demonic visitations. Diadochus explains that the intellect that exists in a state of purification (*kathareuei*) is so vigilant that it can alert itself to a dream's demonic nature while still asleep and cause

25 Ibid., p. 261 (30).
26 Ibid., p. 262 (33).
27 Ibid., p. 263 (33).
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., pp. 263–264 (36).
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., p. 264 (37).
32 Ibid.

the sleeping person to awaken.[33] Here the *neptic* or vigilant mind lives a very different visual life from that of the ordinary person.

Diadochus is as strict on ascetical discipline as are Evagrius, Mark or Neilus with whom he shares the belief that for an ascetic, the aesthetic dimension of nature and human experience is always a diversion that interferes with the undivided love she must have for God. All images and sensibles, without exception, need to be approached with discriminating attention and detachment and any feelings of pleasure associated with their presence immediately dismissed: "All the bodily senses are opposed to faith, for they are concerned with the objects of this present world, while faith is concerned only with the blessings of the life to come."[34] The next passage is far more interesting:

> one pursuing the spiritual way should never be too greatly preoccupied with beautifully branched or shady trees, pleasantly flowing springs, flowery meadows, fine houses or even visits to his family … he should gratefully be content with bare necessities, regarding this present life as a road passing through an alien land (*odon xenen*), barren of all worldly attractions (*pases sarkikes diatheseos eremon*).[35]

The contrast between the colorful sight of idyllic landscapes and the ascetic's "barren" and otherworldly sensibility seems to be a condemnation of art and physical beauty. But in the next chapter Diadochus offers an alternative vision.

He presents Eve as an example of two types of perception: one in which the object is dispassionately constituted (a paradisiacal aesthetic, we might call it) and one in which its form is dictated by the passions:

> But after she had looked at the tree with longing (*hedeos*), touched it with ardent desire (*epithymias epsato*) and then tasted its fruit with active sensuality (*energou hedones*), she at once felt drawn to physical intercourse and, being naked, she gave way to her passion. All her desire was now to enjoy what was immediately present (*paronton*) to her senses …[36]

In the first case, perception does not project on its objects energies related to desire. The subject remains entirely passive and emotionally indifferent; the object exists in a state of pure (unmediated) objectivity. This idea resembles the Maximian concept of *eusebeia*, but it differs from it in one very significant point. Where Diadochus sees total passivity, Maximus sees love for creation, a state of active receptivity or existential openness to beings. For Diadochus, our "love for sensible appearances" (*erota ton opseon*) must be constantly checked and its "wings clipped" (*apteron diaphylattein*)—an obvious reference to the Platonic imagery in *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*.[37]

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33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., p. 269 (55).

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., pp. 269–270 (56). On views of the body and images in Byzantine monasticism, see Parry, "Theodore Studites and the Patriarch Nicephorus."

37 Palmer, Sherrard and Ware, vol. 1, p. 270 (56).

There is, finally, one chapter where Diadochus shows that he was very familiar with the art of painting. He uses a host of terms that have a long history in Greek art criticism, as we shall see later. It is worth listing them: "*epizographein*" (to paint over), "*diagraphein*" (to outline), "*epanthizein*" (to color and make vivid), "*rhuthmizein*" (to contain in a shape or drawn outline), "*grammas*" (drawn lines), "*schema*" (shape), "*chroma*" (color), "*chroia*" (hue), "*kallos*" (beauty), "*metron*" (measure), "*rhythmos*" (shape, pattern) and "*antheron*" (brilliant, colorful).[38]

When he compares acquiring spiritual virtues to coloring an outline, we are reminded of the famous passage in Plotinus that makes sculpting a metaphor for spiritual purification (*Enneads* I.6.9, 1–25).[39] Plotinean asceticism is intellective and so is the beauty that it perceives in the highest stages of divine union:

So the soul when it is purified becomes form (*eidos*) and formative power (*logos*), altogether bodiless and intellectual (*noera*) and entirely belonging to the divine, whence beauty (*kalou*) springs and all that is akin to it. Soul, then, when it is raised to the level of the intellect (*noun*) increases in beauty (*kalon*) (I.6.6, 10–20).

For Diadochus, the soul bathes in the "luminosity of love" (*o photismos tes agapes*) and the experience is described in aesthetic terms.[40] It is worth taking a closer look.

We are told that deification in Christian life takes two forms. The first is passive ("in the divine image" or *kat'eikonan*), the second active or more precisely (as also in Maximus), co-operative (*sun hymin ergasetai*) and Godlike ("in the divine likeness" or *kath'homoiosin*).[41] When a person is baptized in water, the stains of sin (*rutidas*) are removed and "lineaments" (*grammas*) of the soul become visible.[42] Like a soiled object, the soul is washed clean. Alternatively, as happens when a mistake is made in painting, it has whatever spots or smudges obscure its appearance cleared.

The same process can be observed in the second form, that of spiritual baptism, where the purification and gradual perfection of the ascetic is the work of a lifetime: "When the intellect begins to perceive the Holy Spirit with full consciousness, we should realize that grace is beginning to paint (*epizographein*) the divine likeness over the divine image in us."[43] Diadochus then explains: "Artists first draw the outline of a man in monochrome (*eni chromati diagrafousi*), and then add one colour (*chroian epanthizontes*) after another, until little by little they capture (*aposozousin*) the likeness of the subject down to the smallest details."[44] The ascetic, who struggles but also

38 Ibid., p. 288 (89).
39 Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. A.H. Armstrong (7 vols, Cambridge, 1966), vol. 1.
40 Palmer, Sherrard and Ware, vol. 1, p. 288 (89).
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.

surrenders himself to God's merciful grace, is both a painter and a canvas or panel. Some of the colors, perhaps the very basic ones, may be the work of human (his) hands. But the final form or perfection of the image as such is the work of another painter: divine grace or the Holy Spirit.

A second analogy is used in this context and helps refine the first. The divine artist consents to coloring the outline presented to him by the striving ascetic who, like a model exposing itself to the painter, is "humbly standing naked in its *atelier*" (*estotas gymnous te kai aptoetous ei to tautes ergasterion*).[45] Deification is here described in aesthetic and mystical terms: the addition of progressively more refined and brilliant hues (*epanthizousa doxes eis doxan*)—exactly as we see in Orthodox iconography—is "according to a measure and rhythm which cannot be expressed" (*kata metron ti kai rhythmon arreton*).[46]

The use of *rhythmos* in this context is especially intriguing as it is generally accepted that the term originally meant form or pattern (*schema*) and that its association with motion came when it was used to describe the synchronized positions taken by a body in dance.[47] Here, it describes the actions of the Holy Spirit which, like a painter and dancer carefully moves through all facets of the image in a secret choreography and perfects it. The final image, a mystical sight, is visible only to a divinely illuminated intellect (*nous … photisthe*).[48]

A description of the nature and effects of divine illumination prompts the third analogy. It focuses on love, the greatest of virtues bestowed on the ascetic by God, which she receives in due measure according to human nature (*hos chorei de anthropos*).[49] It is this move that seals or completes the portrait: "In portraiture (*homoiographoumenon*), when the full range of colours is added to the outline (*to antheron olon ton chromaton chroma*), the painter captures the likeness of the subject, even down to the smile (*achri kai tou meidiasai*)."[50] Something similar happens to those who are being repainted (*anazographoumenon*) by God's grace in the divine likeness: "when the luminosity of love (*photismos tes agapes*) is added, then it is evident that the image has been fully transformed into the beauty (*euprepeia*) of the likeness."[51]

In this example, it is the exact combination of hues and their proper application in order to ensure luminous form that is the sign of the master artist. The emphasis on precision and fidelity—"down to the smile" and earlier "down to the hair" (*achri kai ton trichon*)—is an implicit reference to the personal nature of the divine endeavor which so respects and loves the

45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Pollitt, *Ancient View*, pp. 223–224.
48 Palmer, Sherrard and Ware, vol. 1, p. 288 (89).
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.

human person that it takes even its minute particularities into consideration. The ascetic is perfected in person and emerges from the divine *atelier* more fully and perspicuously himself, both physically and spiritually. Rather than *kallos* (for beauty), Diadochus uses *euprepeia* and *teleiosis*, comeliness or glory and perfection, to describe the final outcome.[52]

With the exception perhaps of divine light and its effects on perception, there is nothing in the experience of deification that would require such a detailed, even technical, comparison with painting. Diadochus' precise, eloquent and creative use of art critical terms, suggests an independent interest in painting and a desire to include art in theological discourse. From an aesthetic point of view, his view of painting reflects the value assigned in Greek antiquity, as we shall see later, to works which mastered line, color and luminance. All three elements are present here and valorized not only aesthetically, but also, through analogy, theologically.

Despite his opposition to images in the spiritual life, Diadochus turned to art to find the words and the imagery needed for his discussion of deification. This by itself does not constitute an endorsement of artistic expression. But it is consistent with the practical spirituality of Orthodox asceticism which draws its rhetoric from experience and delights, as we know from the counsels of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, in using the phenomena of the natural and social world for spiritual instruction.[53] Thus, when Abba Anthony compares the monk who wanders outside his cell to fish that stay for long out of the water or when Abba Agathon uses a pea to impart on his disciple the need for perpetual discipline in the monastic life, the physical world too is sanctified.[54] Terse and aphoristic, these teachings have a kind of vivid spontaneity and often an iconic power that impresses on their audience not only the meaning but also the form of story. This is a form of speech that paints: the ascetic variety of *ekphrasis*.

Still, the manuals of desert asceticism do teach a view of mental and physical images that resonates with Iconoclastic arguments against the use of religious art in public worship. Some of these common points are worth identifying. The position that art is matter and that matter, irrespective of the skill of the artist or the form achieved in a work of art, cannot portray or convey divinity, was endorsed by the Iconoclastic (pseudo) council of Hiereia (754).[55] The flaws of art, its hierarchs argued, are twofold: reliance

52 Ibid.

53 This may help explain why monastics were fierce opponents of Iconoclasm. Confrontation between the state and monasteries was common in Byzantium and in the post-Byzantine era when monasteries opposed the modernizing and Reformist tendencies of the Church hierarchy, especially the Patriarchate. Iconoclasm was popular among the educated, Hellenizing laity and clergy. Runciman, pp. 40–41; 37–54, 208–225. Florovsky, *Christianity and Culture*, p. 109.

54 John Chryssavgis, *In the Heart of the Desert: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers* (Bloomington, 2008), pp. 42, 71.

55 Mango, *The Art*, pp. 167, 168–169.

on material substances, and the frivolous and expedient nature of the artistic personality.[56] Thus, they rejected the compromise position that like scriptural types and figures, images use physical forms to intimate the divine and in this manner enable a gradual path to higher levels of contemplation. Instead, they proposed the use of symbols like the Cross or sacraments like the Eucharist. Religious images were cultic objects and their removal was an essential step in putting an end to public and private acts of idolatry.[57] Christ's divinity was "uncircumscribable" (*aperigrapton*) and impossible to contain in anything finite and therefore convey in physical form.[58]

In one of its decrees, the Hiereia council echoed the purgative spirituality embraced by desert asceticism: "If anyone attempts to conceive of the divine character of God the *Logos* after the Incarnation in material colors, and does not venerate him wholeheartedly with spiritual eyes, seated brighter than the sun at the right hand of God in the highest on the throne of glory, let him be anathema."[59] The view of the Incarnation expressed here goes back to Origen who recognized its historical nature but argued that it was superseded by Christ's Resurrection and Ascension and should therefore be considered only spiritually and symbolically as "a shadow of the mysteries of Christ."[60] Florovsky observes of this view: "All events were to be interpreted as symbols or projections of some higher, super-temporal and super-historical reality."[61] Iconoclasm was a primitive semiotics.

Not only did images affirm the material reality of their objects and were themselves material but they also enhanced the physical aspects of reality and intensified, as the Desert Fathers had warned, desire and appetite. The documents of Hiereia listed a host of excesses by icon worshippers, who treated images as effigies and invested them with magical powers, and the measures taken to avert such practices (e.g., placing icons high on the walls where they could not be reached, removing candles and lamps placed in front of them and forbidding the burning of incense in their honor).[62]

Desert manuals had also warned about idolatry and demonic interference associated with images. Thus ascetics and Iconoclasts seem to share the belief that for the Christian, sensuous engagement with the world should be fleeting and interest in its objects minimal. Attachment to things and the

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[56] "How senseless is the notion of the painter who from sordid love of gain pursues the unattainable, namely to fashion with his impure hands things that are believed by the heart and confessed by the mouth!" Ibid., p. 166.

[57] The anagogical solution is outlined by Pseudo-Dionysius (fifth–sixth century) in the *Celestial Hierarchy* against the view that images enhance attachment to material things. On the contrary, Divine Providence disables such attachments, as evidenced in the wisdom of Scriptural imagery, and deliberately uses dissimilarities and incongruities to raise the intellect to pure contemplation. PG3:140AB, 141AB.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ambrosios Giakalis, *Images of the Divine: The Theology of Icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council* (Leiden, 1991), p. 101.

[60] Florovksy, *Christianity and Culture*, pp. 110–111.

[61] Ibid., p. 110.

[62] Mango, *The Art*, pp. 157–158.

pleasures elicited by their depiction and recollection should be the subject of vigilant resistance. In the passage quoted above, Christ's divinity is paramount and leaves no room for his humanity (except as an incidental moment hidden in divine mystery). The prohibition against forming vivid images of Christ in color recalls Diadochus' warnings against dwelling on scenes of blossoming flowers and delighting in the lively forms of nature. To the ascetic, he had urged, such sights should be regarded as "alien" and "barren."[63] The stark, punitive simplicity of the Iconoclast crosses that replaced frescos and mosaics on the main apses of churches is very much in this spirit.[64]

Iconoclasm failed, but not without leaving its mark on the iconology and iconography of the Eastern Church. Combined with the austere mentality of Orthodox asceticism and the monastic nature of Orthodox theology, it certainly contributed to a containment of the image within certain aesthetic and thematic parameters. This is evident in the absence from Orthodox art of statues, in the rhetorical ordination of images to their prototype (which is venerated in its image), in the use of biblical quotations and script to identify the holy persons depicted in images, and finally in the regulation of iconographic content.

A good example of this legacy is a work that appears centuries later, the *Painter's Manual* (1730–1734) by Dionysius of Fourna. It is a catalogue of iconographic types drawn directly from Scripture and tradition. Narrative function is primary. An icon is a story-teller that tells by showing. For a scene titled "Christ appearing to the apostles—eats in their presence," the painter is instructed to paint: "A house; in it are the Apostles, with Christ in the midst of them; Peter is before him holding a plate with half a fish and a honeycomb. Christ blesses the plate with his right hand, and takes some of the honey and fish with his left."[65] A second scene is drawn from the parable of the barren fig-tree and prefaced with the appropriate Biblical quotation: "A certain man had a fig tree in his vineyard etc." The painter is then instructed to paint this picture:

> A temple in the midst of which is a grey-haired man with his hands crossed on his chest. Death is by his side holding a scythe; Christ orders Death to cut the man down, and the angel that guards the man's like kneels before Christ and beseeches him saying: 'Lord, let him alone this time.'[66]

The descriptions have a theatrical tone as if the instructions are for staging a play. But they are mostly meant to help the painter accurately depict and the viewer correctly identify the subject of the icon. Thus inscriptions of names and epithets are added to pictures, most notably that of Christ and his

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63 Palmer, Sherrard and Ware, vol. 1, p. 269 (55).

64 Examples can be seen today in two surviving eighth-century churches, the Church of St. Irene, in Istanbul, Turkey and the Church of the *Hagia Sophia*, in Thessaloniki, Greece.

65 Dionysius of Fourna, p. 39.

66 Ibid., p. 43.

Mother. Biblical quotations are featured on scrolls held by Christ and saints in a variety of settings involving hieratic icons, feast cycles, iconostases etc.[67] The use of painting as a pedagogical device was dear to Iconoclasts who saw it as an alternative form of writing: "so that painting might fulfill the purpose of writing."[68] This is not the view of Dionysius but he does seem uninterested in aesthetic matters. When he praises Protaton (Mount Athos) painter Manuel Panselinos (fl. c. 1290) in superlative terms as a master who "obscured with his miraculous art all painters, both ancient and modern," he does not explain why.[69]

As we shall see in detail in Chapter 10, this is also how Damascene approaches images. Damascene argues that painting is no different from writing since in both a physical form is used to convey meaning.[70] No one takes the letter itself for that which the word designates and no one should accordingly confuse the form of a picture with its object. Matter is necessary to deliver form and form is necessary to deliver meaning: "just as we do not adore the matter of the Gospel book or the matter of the cross, but that which is expressed by them (*ektypoma*)."[71] If the Iconoclast bans pictures of Christ, he must also ban the Gospel, reasons Damascene.

Unlike Diadochus, Damascene's arguments show a rather limited appreciation of painting (possibly because of his background and cultural milieu). He sees no difference between letters and figures—the fact, for example, that pictorial qualities are typically absent from the former. Neither he nor St. Theodore Studite give a direct and satisfactory answer to the most challenging of Iconoclast arguments, the claim that art is incapable of depicting (or at least intimating) divinity. The Iconoclasts specifically argued that since painting cannot show the divine nature of Christ, it is bound to misrepresent him—"one of the two [natures] is falsified."[72] It is unreasonable, Damascene replied, to expect the picture of a man to be "endowed with his spiritual faculties: it does not live or think or speak or feel or move a limb."[73] We cannot require of paintings to show divinity because they cannot even show life, thought or emotion in their human subjects. The fault therefore goes to the Iconoclasts who got painting wrong.

Plato's hand is in this argument. He had condemned pictures (*zographia*) to silence in the *Phaedrus* despite their compelling resemblance to real life (275de)—as we shall see, he did not like vivid images.[74] The Studite makes

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67 Ibid., pp. 88–89.

68 Mango, *The Art*, p. 158.

69 Ibid., p. 2.

70 Ibid., pp. 170–171.

71 Ibid., p. 170. For a discussion of iconoclast emphasis on the cross and the Eucharist as the only scripturally prescribed images of Christ and the Incarnation, see Pelikan, pp. 57–58.

72 Theodore the Studite, p. 90 (34).

73 Mango, *The Art*, p. 171.

74 Plato's point plays on the meaning of "*zographia*" (painting of life or living form or live image). Even the liveliest image is deficient: "posing as living" (*esteke hos zonta*) it

a similar argument. The "soul is invisible" and like all human beings, Christ "does not show the property of soul in the appearance of his form." Therefore, a painting can only show his distinctive physical features or "hypostatic properties."[75] In response to the Iconoclastic objection—i.e., that the depiction of Christ after the Resurrection is false because it gives physical form to a "body" that passes through shut doors and disappears on site—Theodore maintained that this visible but nearly incorporeal Christ can still be outlined.[76]

Thus, rather than show how painting can intimate the divinity of Christ, the two theologians reduced images to mere records of a person's physical features—a kind of two dimensional, historical mask. From their perspective, it was important to emphasize the "derivative" (*paragogon*) nature of images and in so doing undermine the Iconoclast equation of their veneration with idolatry.[77] The image cannot be identified with its prototype, the two theologians insisted.[78] If we understand what an image is (its ontology), we will relate to it the right way. Art is therefore all about *mimesis*. It should not be taken for anything else. This argument may help theology but it does not help art. Its allegiance to the Platonic model is clear. Mimetic pictures are reflections of invisible realities. To be viewed correctly, images must not be seen for themselves but for what they depict, for the originals they emulate (or intimate). These originals, moreover, must be encountered not in the (inferior) form given by their pictures but in the (superior) mental objects that they summon in the viewer's mind. To "see" beyond what is shown, without attending to the image per se, is the remedy for indulging in images and therefore for temptation and idolatry.

Like novices, we should look but not let our eyes linger. If possible, we should not look at all. Iconodule iconology repelled Iconoclasm but it did not effectively eliminate it.[79] In a way characteristic of Orthodoxy, the important answer was to be given not by theology but by art. It was Orthodox iconography that made the case for the existence of icons in which the reverent viewer could get a glimpse of purified, illuminated and deified existence because the icon made it present. Maximus lived before the great controversy but his theology had already eliminated its arguments. With him Platonism and Origenism disappear from Christian ontology. Finite beings can be experienced in their perfected existence in this life and the senses too can be deified.

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cannot return questions. The notion of painting as silent speech (*pany siga*) that we find in this passage is adopted by Damascene (see next Chapter). *Phaedrus* 275de.

75 Theodore the Studite, p. 91 (34).

76 Ibid., p. 71 (44).

77 Ibid., pp. 172–173.

78 Ibid., pp. 169–170, 173.

79 Pelikan, pp. 45–46.

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The Mystical Lives of Beings in St. Maximus the Confessor

Maximus' indebtedness to Areopagite theology is well-known.[1] Like Dionysius, Maximus recognized the unbreachable dissimilitude between God and creation and the unceasing desire of the human soul for total divinization (*olen theopoiesantos*) in this life.[2] Perplexed by the mystery of an incarnate and yet hidden God, the Areopagite intellect peers through finite beings in order to find passage to higher realities and in the process converts them to divine signs and symbols. Thus equipped, it scales the distance between immanent and transcendent being with angelic subtlety.

Maximus was greatly (and rightly) impressed.[3] But he reached deeper into this mystical movement and saw in it a sacred conversation between beings and God, a communion stemming from the essential identity of each creature

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1 *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, ed. Paul Rorem (New York, 1987), p. 23. The English translation used in this study, unless otherwise noted, is from this text. See also Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London, 1989); and by the same "The Reception of Dionysius up to Maximus the Confessor," in Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang (eds.), *Re-thinking Dionysius the Areopagite* (London, 2009), pp. 43–53.

2 *Mystagogy*, PG91:701C. On the theological and ascetical sources of Maximus' thought particularly in connection to Origen and Evagrius, see Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London, 1996), pp. 22–38, 63–77. See also Hans Urs von Balthasar: *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Brian E. Daley (San Francisco, 2003). On the origins of Maximus' thought in the Alexandrian tradition and the influence of St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Gregory Nazianzen, see Georges Florovsky, *The Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth and Eighth Century (Collected Works, Vol. 9)*, trans. Raymond Miller, Anne-Marie Dollinger-Labriolle and Helmut Wilhelm Schmiedel (Vaduz: Buchervertriebsantstalt, 1987), vol. 9, pp. 216–237. Key anthologies and studies include: Maximus the Confessor, *Selected Writings*, trans. George C. Berthold (New York, 1985). The English translation used in this study, unless otherwise noted, is from this text. See also *St. Maximus the Confessor: The Ascetic Life, The Four Centuries on Charity*, trans. and ed. Polycarp Sherwood (New York, 1955); Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Chicago, 1995); Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St. Maximus the Confessor* (Crestwood, 1985); Nikolaos Loudovikos, *Eucharistiake Ontologia* (Eucharistic Ontology) (Athens, 1992).

3 Andrew Louth, "The Reception of Dionysius in the Byzantine World: Maximus to Palamas," in Coakley and Stang, pp. 55–69.

and affecting it in its concrete particularity (*kath'ekaston*).[4] In Maximian thought, the divine life has an intimacy with beings that is lacking in Dionysius.[5] God engages his creatures (one by one and all together) with redeeming love and grace, and they respond with their own *logoi* (voices). The difference is beautifully encapsulated in von Balthasar's observation that the Maximian view of creation constitutes an "apologia for finite, created being in the face of the overwhelming power of the transcendent world of ideas."[6] It is this power that lends to the Areopagite hierarchy its detached and specular quality.

For Dionysius, finite beings participate (*metechonta*) in the Eternal Life (*zoen ten aionion*) intimately (*oikeios*) and individually (*ekasto diaspeiretai*).[7] Overflowing with goodness, God embraces all creation (even demons) and in the case of human beings "grants whatever angelic life they are able to absorb"—deification, as in Maximus, is open to all.[8] But creatures are affected according to kind (*apoplerotike kai diaretike zoes*), through the ideas or principles that differentiate them rather than through the unique modes in which they subsist and actualize their natures.[9] This is why they enter the divine hierarchy as images or as similes of themselves. It is *in* images or *as* images (*eikones*, *agalmata*, *indalmata*), Dionysius explains in the *Tenth Letter*, that things visible exist in relation to things invisible (*alethos emphaneis eikones eisi ta orota ton aoraton*).[10] Discarnation is a precondition for divinization. In order to participate in the divine life, things must shed their physical way of being themselves and exist as instances of the principles they embody.

Thus, Areopagite theology compresses beings within a hierarchical order in which their uniqueness and individuality is gradually eliminated. It is not hierarchization per se that brings this about. Rather, it is the conceptual nature of the soul's ascent to God and the absence of due emphasis on the eschatological actuality of beings. Like the desert ascetics, Dionysius disengages the soul from exterior and interior images and directs it toward invisible realities that lie concealed in creation and the divine word. The ascetics associated sanctification with the depletion of the senses. Dionysius looks at the world from the vantage point of contemplative detachment, seeing in beings the imprints and forms of divine intellection.

Considered in themselves, they are a repertory of signs and symbols, creatures of the intellect that move in and out of finite and infinite subsistence. In this manner, finite beings participate analogically through the divine forms that inhere in them in the divine life (*pros pantelen zoen kai athanasian*).[11] But

4 Von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, p. 116.

5 Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Notre Dame, 2005), pp. 6, 9.

6 Von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, pp. 239, 114–126.

7 PG3:856A.

8 PG3:856CD, 857B.

9 Ibid.

10 PG3:1117B.

11 PG3:856D.

their participation is iconic since they are not engaged in their full actuality, as concrete existents. Thus, Areopagite theology comes dangerously close to the iconoclastic association of divinity with discorporation.

The verbal icon, the simile and metaphor can conjure the presence of beings without the intense sensuous and carnal associations caused by actual objects or physical and mental images. The sensuous world does not go away but its power over the soul diminishes. For Dionysius, biblical imagery holds a special place in the soul's purgative ascent to God since its symbolic configurations and hierarchies come under the intimate authority of the divine Word—which hides beneath their figurative exterior. The various events, signs and representations that inform the biblical narrative are the subtle (already thought-mediated) imprints or impressions of imperceptible realities—"types of the typeless" (*atypoton oi typoi*) and "figures of the figureless" (*schemata ton aschemateston*).[12] As their paradoxical nature intimates, they will eventually be set aside in order for the intellect to reach the objectless contemplation of the divine being.

By contrast, Maximian theology leads to a different type of visual discipline.[13] Sensibles of all kinds, including figures and images, are not entirely discarded as in Dionysius where the intellect extracts from beings their essential and clear form, leaves their individuating aspects behind—"the senses are redundant" (*peritai oi aestheseis*)—and turns contemplatively to its own ideational objects.[14] Instead, they are seen and retained in their sanctified and unique existence. The closer one gets to God, the more beings shed their inordinate appearances—the fallen ways of being themselves—and emerge as they truly are, informed with their actualizing reasons and revealing a world immersed and transfigured in divine grace. Rid of its "scales" (*lepidas*), the intellect can see straight into the individual natures of things and recognize their participation in divine life.[15] It is a simultaneous epiphany of truth and being: *tes aletheias o logos anaphainetai*.[16] Finite creatures have their own mystical lives.

The Maximian intellect travels the distance between finite beings and God but as it rises to higher states of contemplation, it does not let go of what the earlier stages have revealed. Instead, it retains all sights in a majestic vision of an animated and variegated world in which creatures participate in their sanctification by a simultaneous realization of their nature and interrelational existence. It is a "cosmic liturgy," as Balthasar has aptly called it, or, conversely, what we might call a liturgical cosmos: one engaged in the holy

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[12] *Celestial Hierarchy*, PG3:140A; *Divine Names*, PG3, 708D; *Mystical Theology*, PG3:1025AB; Louth, "The Reception of Dionysius in the Byzantine World," p. 57.

[13] Alexander Golytzin, "Dionysius Areopagites in the Works of Saint Gregory Palamas: On the Question of a 'Christological Corrective,' and Related Matters," in Lourié and Orlov, pp. 83–105; and by the same "Dionysius Areopagites: A Christian Mysticism?" in Lourié and Orlov, pp. 128–179.

[14] PG3:708D–709A.

[15] PG90:1160B.

[16] Ibid.

and sanctifying acts that redeem creation.[17] The closer one gets to God, the more encompassing, clear and intimate this vision becomes. Here, the ascetic and mystic, like another Christ (*alter Christus*), gathers all creation to himself.[18]

> The pure mind is found either in simple ideas (*psilois noemasi*) or human things or in the natural contemplation of visible realities (*oraton phusike theoria*), or in that of invisible realities, or in the light of the Holy Trinity. The mind which is settled in the contemplation of visible realities searches out either the natural reasons (*phusikous logous*) of things or those which are signified by them (*di'auton semainomenon*), or else it seeks the cause itself. Dwelling in the contemplation of the invisible it seeks both the natural reasons of these things, the cause of their production, and whatever is consequent upon them, and also what is the Providence and judgment concerning them.[19]

Even as one is contemplating invisible realities, the visible world, contained dynamically in its actualizing reasons, does not disappear. Elaborate hierarchies of symbols, logically arranged according to degrees of abstraction and interpreted according to categories like causality, existence, participation etc. dominate the Areopagite system. But they are only one of the many dimensions of the Maximian cosmos, in which this intellective architecture is complemented by the intellect's full immersion in and existential surrender to (*eusebeia*) the being of things (see discussion of the concept below).[20]

If in Dionysius creation risks being reduced to a divinely structured logical system of signs, in Maximus it is elevated to a consecrated space of hypostatic perfection, where beings are revealed in their plenary (plerotic) subsistence to an intellect that in turn becomes plenary in its act of knowing them. Thus the appearances that things put forth, their images and concepts of themselves, remain visible in them and the result is the inclusion of image and idea in the life of the being itself—its participation in an act of self-revelation that does not entirely yield to intellectual abstraction.

In the *Letter to Titus*, Dionysius explains that only imperfect souls (*atelesi ton psychon*) find solace in the poetic images and figures (*poietikais ieroplasties*) found in Scripture.[21] This is a function of their inability to "pass through" (*diavainein*) an economy of "sacred symbols" (*ieron symvolon*), to peer through their sensible, crude (*aischras*) exterior—even figures of beasts are used (*theriomorphian*) to convey some aspects of the deity—and discern the divine presence.[22] Images of all kinds hide and shield (*kryphion*) divine realities under their "lowly" and "vulgar" appearance (*hamaizelous*, *tapeinotetas*) and protect them from profanation (*vevelois*)—only mystagogues can lift that veil and "rise through them to their immaterial archetypes" (*aylous archetypias*).[23] He calls

[17] Von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, p. 85.
[18] *Chapters on Love* PG3: I. 100.
[19] PG3: I. 97, 98, 99.
[20] *Letter to Titus*, PG3:1108D–1109A; *Ambiguum Liber*, PG3:1133BC.
[21] PG3:137AB, 140AB; *Letter to Titus*, PG3:1104B, 1108ABC.
[22] Ibid. PG3:141B, 144CD–145A.
[23] PG3:140A, 144BC, 145AB, 1108A.

them "riddles" (*ainigmaton*) which need to be "undressed" (*apodyntas*) and revealed in their naked purity (*gymna kai kathara*) in order to become proper objects of contemplation—the intellect grasping in these disembodied forms the "well of divine life flowing into itself" (*pegen zoes ei eauten heomenen*).[24]

Similar to the similes and parables of Scripture, all things visible in the world (*phainomenou pantos kosmourgia*) are designed to reveal invisible (*aoraton provevletai*) and immaterial realities.[25] With Scripture as its key, creation becomes an extension of the divine Word—a text begging to be read and deciphered. Those that see individual things in their unique actuality are in this view fixated on a fragmented theophany of traces, impressions and symbols (*theoplastia*, *hieroplastia*).[26] What is god-like or "appropriate to God" (*theoeides*) in both things and figures of speech is not their very being (the way they realize their natures) but rather the meanings that the illuminated intellect (*theologikou photos enapeplesmena*) extracts from the appearances (*phainomena*) they put forth.[27]

Areopagite ontology is in this regard a type of semiology. This becomes clear when Dionysius, for example, explains: "But let us not suppose that the outward face of these contrived symbols exists for its own sake (*hyper eauton*) … the real lovers of holiness … have the simplicity of mind and the receptive, contemplative power to cross over to the simple, marvelous, transcendent truth of the symbols."[28] In Maximus, by contrast, it is in and by their very nature and acts of existence and the intellective forms that arise in them that beings reveal their sanctity. On the subjective side of this revelation is a reverent, animating and hypostasizing intellect that assumes in its act of knowing the creative, perfecting and loving activity of God toward all creation. What the intellect makes out of its object is not ideas or sensuous concepts but a being in which these concepts subsist. This ontic residue never leaves intellection in Maximus. In its theophanic moments, as we shall see, the sanctified intellect participates in an unprecedented ontophany.

By contrast, rather than incorporate and engage the divine light in their act of self-perfection, the beings that constitute the Dionysian hierarchy simply receive and deflect it, like mirrors. Hierarchy is defined as a "sacred order, knowledge (*episteme*) and activity (*energeia*)" which responds to the "illuminations" (*ellampseis*) it receives from God by trying to "assimilate" (*aphomoioumene*) them and become as much like Him as possible: "raised to the imitation of Him (*theomimeton*) in its own measure."[29] The ensuing theophany is intellective in terms of its origin and photic in terms of its end, reflecting the degree to which the ideas that the intellect has made out of

24 PG3:1104BC.
25 PG3:1108B, 1117B.
26 PG3:1105C, 137AB.
27 PG3:1105C.
28 Ibid.
29 PG3:164A. Louth, *Denys*, p. 38.

things can absorb the divine light.[30] Present principally (in proxy) as ideas of themselves, beings do not participate in theophany hypostatically. Instead, they are drawn to the divine presence by virtue of its superlative luminance and that aspect of themselves that is most akin to intellection.

In a passage from the third chapter of the *Celestial Hierarchies*, this reflective (specular) and static relationship of beings to the divine light is clearly outlined:

> … looking unwaveringly to his divine comeliness, the hierarchy receives his stamp (*apotypoumenos*) as much as possible and makes its own members divine images (*agalmata*), perfectly clear and spotless mirrors (*esoptra*), receptive (*dektika*) to the ray of the primordial and thearchic light (*aktinos*), and divinely filled with the brilliance that has been given to it (*endidomenes*); and those in their turn, without envy, become sources of illumination for others (*eis ta exes analamponta*), in accordance with thearchic arrangements.[31]

Like a system of mirrors, the higher parts of the hierarchy receive the divine light and diffuse it to those below, illuminating the entire structure (*cosmos*). Beings of all kinds pose as images or figures (*agalmata*) and in that stationary position reflect and spread the light according to their capacity. Nothing in this arrangement moves. Having been rendered thoroughly receptive to the divine presence, the members of this imaginal and noetic universe exist like templates on which it deposits its splendor (*aglaias*).[32]

Dionysius does mention the recipients' perfection (*teleiosis*) in this context as well as their synergy with God, but he characterizes the former in terms of imitation (*theomimeton*) and the latter in terms of reflection (*anaphainomenen*).[33] An active state is implied—"to become as they say co-workers (*synergoi*) of God and to the degree possible make the divine activity (*energeian*) visible in themselves (*en eauto*)"—but the activity seems confined to how a thing receives and reflects the divine light and its perfection is accordingly measured in these terms.[34] It is not clear how theophany affects the inner world of beings, their intimate acts of self-realization. In this respect, Areopagite theophany has an abstract and detached quality. It affects beings by virtue of their position (placement) in an intellective order, as thought-objects, rather than by their particular reality.[35]

It is an intriguing image of the cosmos but one that favors its intellectual experience. Orders of natural and artificial symbols (*aestheta symbola*) cast in a variety of forms (*polymorpha*) occupy designated positions from where they exercise their conditional and imperfect existence.[36] They include animals,

30 Louth, *Denys*, p. 39.

31 Ibid. PG3:165A. I am using Louth's translation.

32 PG3:165AB.

33 PG3:165BC.

34 PG3:165B.

35 Louth calls it "impersonal" but suggests that transmission nullifies this quality. Louth, *Denys*, pp. 39–40.

36 PG3:1105BC, PG3:1104B.

plants and the natural world in general but also all kinds of figures, signs, symbols, spectacles, images, types, configurations etc. perceptible to the human mind. Dionysius summons a wide range of terms to describe them: *theamata* (spectacles), *symbola* (symbols), *typoi* (types), *eikonai* (icons), *morphai* (shapes/figures), *schematismoi* (configurations), *apotypomata* (impressions), *synthemata* (signals).[37] All suggest a patterned configuration of a transient nature from which meaning can be readily extracted and an original discerned. As in Damascene, where these terms are quite common, they can be used equivocally of things, pictures and figures of speech.

The same verbs used for painting and giving shape to things (e.g., *graphein*, *plattein*) are used for metaphors, similes and allegories since they too paint (verbal) pictures of their objects (*en tois logiois eikonographian*).[38] It is therefore easy for Dionysius—and evident in the compressive nature of his hierarchy—to envision a progressive defiguration (*aphaireseos*) in which things give way to pictures, pictures to words, words to concepts and concepts to ideas, until all substantive form disappears leaving the intellect free to perceive "that which lies beyond sight and knowledge" (*to hyper thean kai gnosin auto*).[39]

The Areopagite liturgy is replete with such moments. Church rites and rubrics center on objects and acts (e.g., perfumed oil, incense, censing motions etc.) that are attractive and pleasing to the senses but dissimilar (*anomoiois*) to the holy realities they signify.[40] This is evident only to holy men (*osion andron*) whose purified intellects can discern in the sights (*thea*), scents and sounds of the liturgy the invisible (*atheatoi*) mysteries ciphered in their physical appearance.[41] Thus, the fragrant substances of the holy ointment (*symvolike synthesis*) are the spiritual graces bestowed on the faithful by Jesus whose divinity and mercy is also apparent in the oil's lustrous texture and healing effect.[42] Characteristically, Dionysius compares these hierarchs to painters (*grapheus*) who keep their eyes fixed (*aklinos*) on the originals (*archetypon*) they are replicating, thus avoiding all other sights and diversions (*aparenglitos*).[43] For these conceptual iconographers, all things sensed are similes, all images sacred signs and metaphors. The more symbolic an object, the holier it is—the iconoclastic solution.[44]

Passages that describe mystical experience combine philosophical idiom with *ekphrastic* rhetoric: "Let us now gaze into its [sacrament of the ointment] more divine beauty (*theioteron kallos*). Let us see it for what it is, stripped of its veils, shiningly available in its blessed splendor, filling us abundantly with that fragrance (*euodias*) which is apparent only to people of intelligence."[45]

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37 PG3:1104B–1109A.
38 PG3:137B.
39 *Mystical Theology*, PG3:1025A.
40 *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, PG3:473BCD.
41 PG3:473BCD.
42 PG3:477C–480A.
43 PG3:473BC.
44 PG3:144BC.
45 PG3:476B.

The existence of a parallel, hidden world, lying beyond the world revealed by the senses is Plato's legacy—here embraced in unequivocal terms. Its iconography is splendid, free of all sensibility, filled with paradoxical objects like "most divine vapors" (*theiotatous atmous*) and "spiritual food" (*trophe noete*).[46]

Ironically, despite the denigration of the senses—"empty appearances" (*dokounton eike kalon*)—the language used in this and similar passages is that of aesthetic experience.[47] It delivers a mixture of theological and poetic imagery that, as we have seen in earlier chapters, survives to this day in the theological laudation of art. In this respect, Dionysius' rhetoric of "praise and entreaty" did not only set the foundation for what Louth calls "the most typical theological language (in the sense of language that appropriately reaches out towards God)."[48] It also became (especially in the East) the Church's most typical aesthetic language, its means of affirming (and ensuring) the legitimacy of art in liturgy and devotion.

Creative and vibrant, the Maximian universe unfolds in space and time, concealing behind this movement the essence of its creator and revealing his existence. Theophany, cosmophany and ontophany converge. Centered in the *Logos* who empties himself so that human nature and all creation may partake of the divine life and be beheld in their fullness, this universe unfolds like a ladder that unites created and uncreated life.[49] It is Norman Russell, in his summation of the Maximian synthesis, who has best and most succinctly described this movement and the relationship between the Incarnation and deification in Maximus: "*Katabasis* is followed by *anabasis*, *kenosis* by *theosis*."[50] In our view, this relationship is even more dynamic because the realities suggested by these terms intersect and interpenetrate, open and close their boundaries, like the eternal mysteries of Christ's Death and Resurrection, which Byzantine hymnography painted in paradox.

We know right away that this is no ordinary theology. Through its remarkable synthesis of figurative and conceptual thought, Maximus' writing seems to achieve at points the vitality of the world it strives to encompass and align with the risen Christ. But it also recedes in a conceptual depth and embraces a silence that, as we shall see later, resonates with Christ's Passion and death. It is speculative but not abstract. Concepts are articulated with a subtle corporeality, consonant with Christ's at once divine and human body—the mystery of the Incarnation. Words and images appear and withdraw into each other the moment one tries to disentangle them. Language becomes aesthetic. Densely packed ideas inform and activate the similes used to express them, while the tacit imagery carried by these elusive figures of speech outlines and elucidates speculative concepts.

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46 PG3:473BCD, 480A, 473BCD.
47 PG3:476A.
48 Louth, "The Reception of Dionysius in the Byzantine World," pp. 57–58.
49 *Commentary on the Lord's Prayer*, PG90:905D–908A.
50 Russell, pp. 269–270.

In *Difficulty 10*, Christ is described with a metaphor used by St. Gregory Nazianzen, as the Word that "became flesh to be with us, being thickened in syllables and letters (*syllavais kai grammasi pachythenta*) to be perceived by us (*dia ten aesthesin*), inclining every power of the intelligible within us towards himself (*olen tou en emin noerou ten dynamin pros eauten epiklinasa*)."[51] He is formed in flesh, syllables and letters. He is living, tangible and intimate. He enters into our senses and intellect and drawing from the power which he summons in them—as from a deeper sanctified ground that recognizes him—gives them their proper object (and life). Thus the very faculties that ordinarily deny and obscure him—the senses that are confined to "nothing higher than what is seen," the intellect that is suffering the "death of ignorance"—now assist in his revelation.[52]

Maximian theology is written in the modality of the mysteries that envelop it, and is thoroughly absorbed in the experience of the realities that it tries to elucidate. It is a theology that is ascetic and mystical not only in subject matter but in form as well. Louth describes it this way:

> characteristic of Maximus' approach to theology is his tendency to work out his ideas in relation to specific images, or icons; Maximus seems to prefer to unfold images and concepts, sometimes his thought seems to me to move laterally than logically … I think Maximus should be approached meditatively, though his method of meditation by no means excludes sustained intellectual concentration …[53]

This lateral quality is further defined by Louth in the introduction to his English translation of *Difficulty 10*. It is a profound observation that aligns theological language with Maximus' core vision of cosmic sanctification:

> The movement of his mind is that of one who ponders and meditates, patiently drawing together all sorts of apparently diverse concerns. It is what is sometimes called 'lateral thinking,' i.e., his mind does not move straight ahead in conformity to a linear, logical argument, rather it moves sideways, and gathers together a collection of considerations that are gradually made to converge.[54]

We see the impact of this dense, measured and poetic way of writing theology in another example from his preamble to the *Mystagogy*. God, if we may translate his text rather literally, is

> … the sole intellect (*monos nous*) in those who think (*noounton*) and in the things that can be thought (*nooumenon*), the sole voice (*monos logos*) in those who speak (*legonton*) and in the things that can be spoken of (and can speak of themselves) (*legomenon*), the life (*zoe*) in those who live (*zonton*) and are made alive and live for themselves (*zooumenon*).[55]

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[51] PG91:1129CD.

[52] PG91:1129 CD–1132B.

[53] Jill Raitt (ed.), *Wisdom of the Byzantine Church: Evagrius of Pontos and Maximus Confessor, Four Lectures by Andrew Louth* (Columbia, 1997), p. 21.

[54] This passage prompted me to look for a more explicit connection between the rhetoric and thought of Maximus. Louth, *Maximus*, p. 94.

[55] PG91:664A.

From an aesthetic point of view, things with voices and inherent lives need a commensurate iconography in which images can bring themselves to life (*zooumena*) and speech (*legomenon*). No reflective mirrors are needed here. What God touches speaks for itself. And so do its images.

Maximus uses this masterful formulation to introduce the inherence in the divine mind, word and life of the distinctive minds, words and lives of all beings. A God who himself exists in a self-communicating manner, in Trinity, engages in conversation with his creatures, one by one and all together, and they in turn exist in order to converse with him their own existence, to be themselves and with each other, in his own life. He moves right inside their being to give it its very own mind, voice and life, to bring the finite beyond its finitude and into his life of eternity.

Grace envelops creation in the same mystical movement from essence (*ousia*) to subsistence (*hypostasis*) that God reveals to those who seek to know him in love (*tois philotheois*).[56] God is "unity in trinity and trinity in unity," three persons (*hypostaseis*) in one simple essence.[57] He is Trinity by reason of his "mode of existence and subsistence" (*ton tou pos hyparxein kai hyphestanai logon*), the three persons existing in one, without losing their distinctiveness (*synairesei*) or fragmenting (*memeristai*) their unity.[58] Essence or *ousia* is the common nature (*koine physin*) that does not identify the particular as such (e.g., being woman but not this particular woman), while *hypostasis* presupposes *ousia* and constitutes its realization.[59]

Maximus defines *hypostasis* as the unique presence and form (*en to tini idios paristosa kai perigraphousa*) that its nature takes in a particular thing—which in the human being becomes the person or *prosopon*.[60] It is the distinctive way in which a thing carries its nature (*to meta tou katholou, echon ti kai eidikon*)—the manner, for example, in which this or that woman exists (and in so doing realizes) her womanhood.[61] As such, it simultaneously constitutes and expresses the creative and concrete dynamism of its *ousia*.

In the *Chapters on Knowledge*, thought (*noesis*) is presented as a creative act in which both thinker and world participate. It is not only the human person "who bears the power of thinking in himself" and is therefore a subject or *hypokeimenon*.[62] In every act of thought, numerous beings converge (*pasa noesis plethous*) and participate.[63] The creature that is being known becomes itself a *hypokeimenon*—within the knowing act a dialogue ensues, a sort of responsorial gesture—and in so doing participates in the act that thinks it: "and what is thought of is a subject as such (*kai to*

56 PG91:700BCD.

57 PG91:700D.

58 PG91:701A.

59 PG91:265CD. For an in-depth discussion of Maximian terminology including *ousia*, *hypokeimenon*, *hypostasis*, *hyparxes* etc., see Von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, pp. 216–235.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 PG90:1116BC.

63 Ibid.

nooumenon hypokeimenon ti) or dwells in a subject, having inherent in it the capacity of being thought of ...."[64]

This synergic subsistence does not alter the divine hiddeness. Finite things become objects of knowledge by making manifest their beginning, becoming and end, but God is known only in what these knowing acts reveal of his existence: "*ek ton nooumenon monon einai pisteuetai*."[65] In his essence, God is unknown:

> ... He is the principle of being who is creative of essence (*ousiopoios*) and beyond essence (*hyperousios*), a ground (*idrysis*) who is creative of power but beyond power, the active and eternal condition of every act (*energeias drastike kai ateleutetos hexis*) ... the Creator (*poietike*) of every essence, power, and act, as well as every beginning, middle, and end.[66]

Implicit here is the Incarnational mystery. In the person of the Son (*hypostasis*, *prosopon*) the divine essence most explicitly and profoundly embraces finite existence and through the Holy Spirit pours its actuality in all things. This is the great synthesis that von Balthasaar invites us to see in Maximus: in Christ all beings are justified (and redeemed).[67]

In the opening chapters of the *Chapters on Knowledge* we are told of essences that are "principles of movement" (*arche kineseos*) and circumscribe (*perigraphomene*) the acts that realize them.[68] Limits are set as conditions of realization (and sanctification) rather than as confining or static boundaries. It is as if beings choreograph their existence by making manifest imperfectly their nature or essence. Where there is life, where things exist, where activity is present, God is present. In Maximus, the contemplation of God begins with the discernment in things of *archai* and *logoi*. They are the originating and self-articulating reasons made evident in the way that finite existents remain active within their own self-contained being—a space in which they both assert and encounter their identity (and in the case of human beings consciously transcend it).[69] The intellect that turns to the figures and signs of Scripture—as in Dionysius—also pauses in the presence of finite beings and looks for evidence in them of the same movement that permeates the divine life.[70] Maximus never strays from this vision that follows the ascetic all the way to theophany and deification.

A passage in the first chapter of *Mystagogy* outlines the sights that accompany the higher stages of contemplation and divine union. God reaches out to the totality of beings which depend on him for their existence

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[64] Ibid.

[65] PG90:1085C.

[66] PG90:1984C.

[67] Von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, p. 66.

[68] PG90:1984B.

[69] PG90:1085C.

[70] See the chapter on Maximus in John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Washington D.C., 1969), pp. 99–115.

and "contains, gathers and limits them" (*sunechei, sunagei, perigraphei*) while simultaneously drawing them to himself and to each other.[71] Thus, the very same grace that gives a thing its identity also opens it to relationship and completion, effectively reconciling its nature (*logos*) with its mode of existence (*tropos*).[72] Out of this act of divine providence and love—for God embraces as he binds (*eauto endiasfingei*) and perfects as he distinguishes (or distinguishes by perfecting and restoring beings to their original natures)—beings of all kinds yield to the divine light and are outshined by the divine presence (*hyperlampousan*, *hyperphaneis*) without lapsing into non-existence (*ou me einai poiein*).[73]

Illumination is here pervasive but it creates no shadows; nothing is obscured. Things are so intensely animated that in this exuberant actuality they create the impression of stillness. God's hiddeness or withdrawal into himself happens simultaneously with this expressive and total theophany. It is a hiddeness that is visible only to those whose clear minds can gather the actualizing reasons of beings that unfold before them, and having grasped them all in one singular instant, come to "see God himself, as cause and principle and end (*aetian kai archen kai telos*) of the creation and generation of all things, the unextended or undistanced depth in which all are contained (*puthmena tes panton perioches adiastaton*)."[74]

In its most mystical moments, the Maximian universe has a cruciform structure. It opens horizontally to embrace creation in a plerotic and expressive mode. But it also descends vertically to its own unfathomable cause where being disappears in a kenotic and silent motion only to be drawn again toward its other polarity (height), the transcendent, supra-natural *Logos* that keeps it from dissolution and loss. Dynamic and multi-dimensional but also placid and simple, it encompasses the distance between being and non-being, redemption and sin, transcendence and immanence, life and death, in which the drama of creation and divine love unfolds. Only Christ's death can call upon human life and all life to be truly itself. Only a voice that speaks from silence can bring words to life. *Only the image that disappears in its own depth and issues from there its own reality can be alive (and not an idol).*

This dramatic view of the Cross reiterates (re-enacts) the logic of the theophanic mysteries implicit in the Incarnation (Passion and Resurrection) and recalls the great moments of silence, seclusion and solitude in Christ's life. Transferred to art, this notion leads us to approach the painted image as a self-communicative (performative) being that brings its objects to visibility

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71 PG91:664D.

72 For a discussion of this idea in Maximus and Aquinas, see von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, pp. 71–72. For the terms *logos* and *tropos* in this context, see Louth, *Maximus*, pp. 56–58.

73 PG91:665AB.

74 *Adiastaton* is a term used by Plotinus to describe eternity as the life of the intellect (the Platonic *eide* concentrated into one Supreme Life free of variation and becoming, complete and immutable. See Plotinus, *The Enneads*, III, 7, 3. See also Eva Brann, *What, Then, Is Time?* (London, 2001), p. 98. PG91:665BC.



1 *Diver Jumping from a Tower into the Sea*, "Tomb of the Diver," early 5th century B.C., Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Paestum, Italy



2 Theophanes the Greek, *The Holy Trinity (Hospitality of Abraham)*, c. 1374, Cathedral of Transfiguration, Ilyina Street, Novgorod, Russia



3 Mark Rothko, *No. 9*, 1958, Collection of the Fukuoka City Bank Ltd., Fukuoka, Fukuoka Prefecture, Japan



4 Andrei Rublev, *The Savior*, c. 1394, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia



5 Mark Rothko, *Untitled*, 1951, The National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., U.S.A.



6 *Christ Pantocrator*, 14th century, Byzantine Museum, Athens, Greece



7 *The Apostle Thomas*, mid. 14th century, Holy Metropolis of Thessaloniki, Greece



8 Marc Chagall, *A Wheatfield on a Summer's Afternoon*, Study for backdrop for Scene III of the ballet *Aleko*, 1942, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, N.Y., U.S.A.

by simultaneously revealing and withholding in this act the ground of their revelation. What makes it a Christian image is therefore the fact that it engages *qua* image in a mystical act; that it *is* a mystical act, aligned by structure and operation to the mystery of the Cross.

There is a passage in the *Chapters on Knowledge* where Maximus sketches the cruciform logic of Christian theophany (and cosmophany). His writing in this instance recalls a type of speech and composition present in Greek literature from the time of Homer. In it patterns of thought and patterns of world are brought together in a singular form and sentences are structured (e.g., using polarity, analogy) like the objects or events they portray.[75] Combined with philosophical and theological abstraction, it can have an impressive effect, as we see in this passage:

> The Mystery of the Incarnation of the Word bears the power (*dynamin*) of all the hidden meanings and figures of Scripture as well as the knowledge of visible and intelligible creatures (*ktismaton*). The one who knows the mystery of the cross and the tomb knows the principles of these creatures. And the one who has been initiated into the ineffable power of the Resurrection knows the purpose (*skopon*) for which God originally made all things (*ta panta*). All visible things (*phainomena*) need a cross, that is, a capacity which holds back their participation of what is active in them according to sense. All intelligible things (*nooumena*) need a tomb, that is, the total immobilization of the activities of the mind in them. For when this natural activity and movement with respect to all things is taken away along with their participation, the Word which alone exists by itself (*o monos eph'eauton hyparchon*) as if he had risen from the dead is manifested anew (*ek nekron egegermenos anaphainetai*), having in outline all which is from him, though absolutely nothing has any kinship with him in any natural relationship. For it is by grace (*kata charin*) and not by nature that he is the salvation of those who are saved.[76]

Christ is the ontological and epistemological "gate" through which all beings and ideas pass as they strive to realize their nature. Crucifixion, burial and resurrection are cosmic mysteries. They form an ongoing divine, human and natural drama of strife (mortification), surrender (death) and divinization (resurrection) in which the ascetic engages together with all creation. Redemption is inscribed in the very being of things but it is a "door" that only Christ can open.

Maximus uses the three key moments of the incarnational mystery as a theological iconography and relies on its stark imagery—Cross, Tomb, Resurrection—to bring the reader's thought to a standstill, as if confronting her mind with the ineffable and ungraspable reality of God's sacrifice. To come close to the divine Word, to hear it speak and understand it, theology must first strip itself of all that it knows and resign to silence. It is in that state that it will discover its true voice, one given to it as a gift (*kata charin*). We

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[75] William G. Thalmann, *Conventions of Form and Thought in Early Greek Poetry* (Baltimore, 1984), pp. 27–32.

[76] PG90:1108AB. I wish to thank Fr. Agathonikos Nikolaides for bringing this passage to my attention.

must learn, Maximus insists, to theologize through Christ together with the rest of creation. Christian theology is radically ontological. Christian ontology is radically theological. Ontology without God misses the "passion" or truth of beings.

The lines "all visible things (*phainomena*) need a cross" and "all intelligible things (*nooumena*) need a tomb" are carefully structured (composed) to deliver this point. It is things and thoughts that need the Cross and the Tomb—rather than those that sense and think them. Here we have once again the notion that all beings exist as *hypokeimena* (i.e., from the depth rather than the surface of their existence) and that those who sense and think them must actually live this truth and do so through Christ's Passion.

The theologian and the philosopher must first suffer the existence of creation, as Christ did. They must reach the dead end of their own perceptions and thoughts, of all their familiar *tropoi*, and rise again into the full reality of the substances they claim to understand and explicate. Communion rather than mere participation is the key and the difference is conveyed by the entrance and descent of Christ—his literal death—into the non-being (the separation from God and from themselves) that torments creatures. This act of divine empathy stands opposite the luminous mystery of the Transfiguration. In the darkness of Christ's death, the salvific power of the Cross extends to all corners of creation (including Hades).

Maximus' imagery has amazing plasticity and conceptual range. But it is also disciplined and logically structured. On the subjective side, the ascent is outlined in increments. The removal of the obscurations caused by inordinate sensations (*aistheseis*) and passions (*pathe*) comes first and is followed by the ascetic's sensuous and affective encounter with the true natures of things.[77] Tempted by these new sights that beg knowledge and explanation, the intellect must exercise a similar discipline. It must cease its reasonings and come to a state of repose, to the empathic contemplation of the actualizing reasons (*logoi*) of things.

Beings are to be perceived and thought from their own standpoint, in the terms that they pose by being what they are. The perceiver's standpoint is that of humility and reverence (*eusebeia*). This pluridimensional vision becomes increasingly lucid and exact but also vivid and relational. Thus instructed and formed by beings, the intellect grasps totality as a communal "passion" where beings persist in their distinctiveness. This is the moment associated with the Resurrection. Creation is now dynamic and unitive; things exist in contained plenitude, charismatic immanence and unceasing communion. The "coinherence" of God and creation becomes clear.[78]

This notion will resonate four centuries later with St. Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022), whose poetry we will discuss in some detail later, in Chapters 11 and 12. Symeon wrote that in the soul's experience of divine

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[77] PG90:1105D, 1109C–1111AB.

[78] Louth, *Maximus*, p. 73.

union the senses are "gathered together wholly within the intellect" and become one simple act.[79] "He [God] is both seen and heard, is sweet to the taste and perfume to the sense of smell: he is felt and so made known. He both speaks and is spoken."[80] The transference of the senses to the intellect recalls Dionysius but the resemblance disappears once we realize that they are fully present in the divine vision: "those who have been deemed worthy see by means of all of their senses Him Who is all good and yet transcends every good thing. As by a single perception compounded of many senses, they grasp Him Who is Himself both One and Many."[81] Symeon's universe is inclusive, relational and communicative. Contracting into the person and voice of the One that he seeks and loves, it simultaneously expands into a multitude of beings until it is enveloped and transfigured in divine light.

Symeon's obsession with finding the right (adequate) language for his visions is absent from Maximus who brings to this task the full powers of an incisive intellect infused with the imagination of a poet and the austere sensibility of an ascetic. His Aristotelian conception of being as act and passion brings movement, measure and elegance to his entire theological enterprise and allows him to align theophany with divine love and ontological perfection in a profound way. It is important to take a closer look at this aspect of his thought.

As with *enargeia* in painting—where the image is so lively that it moves out of itself (and cannot for this reason be a simulacrum) and so rooted in its own being that this outward movement never exhausts it but instead affirms it as substance—it is the overflow and abundance of being that catches the attention of the ascetical intellect. Beings call upon it, because their *logoi* belong to the summative *Logos* of all beings and speak in his voice. This is not a mute, impersonal causality (such, for example, that underlies the Buddhist universe) but rather one that touches each creature and speaks through it and to it intimately: "would he not know that the one *Logos* is many *logoi*? … that the many *logoi* are the one *Logos* to whom all things are related and who exists in himself without confusion, the essential and individually distinctive God, the *Logos* of God the Father."[82]

Seen in their distinctive, hypostatic being (*ten kath'hypostasin tautoteta*), things enact the *logoi* that define them by giving them sensible form. An implicit unity sustains this movement and brings it to fruition (*enopoiou dynameos*) in a thing's existing for itself while also surrendering itself, in every instance of its existence, to others—in what Maximus calls "the kinship in love (*philikes syggeneias*) mystically inspired for them in union."[83] Being a substance, a thing has "the aptness to exist *in itself*" and at the same time

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79 Symeon, *On the Mystical Life*, vol. 1, p. 123.

80 Ibid.

81 Symeon, *On the Mystical Life*, vol. 1, p. 124.

82 *Ambiguum 7*, PG91:1077C. The English text is from Maximus, *On the Cosmic Mystery*, p. 54.

83 PG91:685B.

be "*towards-others*," to quote the noted Thomist Norris Clarke.[84] But there is more to this expressive and relational act. As George Berthold eloquently observes of this passage, it is love rather than nature that determines identity.[85]

Reaching out to each and every creature, this love whose source is the Trinitarian life, defines Maximus' vision of a resurrected universe in which "the unique divine power will manifest itself in all things in a vivid and active presence (*enarge te kai energon parousian*) proportioned to each one (*analogos ekasto*)."[86] Here, *enargeia* describes the diverse (open) and binding communion (*enoseos synterouses desmon*) between creation and God in which beings shine with "dignity and splendor" (*kat'euprepeian kai doxan*).[87] Rather than stand inert under the brilliance of divine light and surrender passively to its blinding rays (as in Areopagite theophany), creatures emerge as the vibrant and self-contained recipients of a hypostatic redemption by means of which they can (now) truly belong to themselves—because they finally belong (actively, communicatively) to God and to each other.

The entire Maximian universe is in a state of *enargeia*. Beings actualize their natures as unconscious and conscious participants in the divine economy. *Enargeia* is the hypostatic expression of divinization. Consummated eschatologically, it is present in the acts which unite finite beings with their nature at every single moment of their being. If we think of the Christian image in this context, *enargeia* becomes its distinctive quality. We can see why mere representation, however beautiful or integral, proportional and clear it may be, will not suffice because what it delivers is ultimately only a likeness. In a Maximian aesthetic, wherever *enargeia* is present, something is actually bringing itself to existence. Therefore nothing needs to be re-presented. *Enargeia* is the coming out of itself and toward its nature of substance. It is the *parousia* of a being to itself and others, the intensity with which it makes itself present. The concept invites us to look at the work of art not as a replication of reality (an image-copy, detached from that which it represents) but as a reality in its own right.

Enargeia is possible because beings have the capacity to enter synergically in the divine love that perfects them—Maximus, as Louth reminds us, calls this the "blessed passion" (*makariou pathous*).[88] They receive love, realize love and share love. God does not offer himself to finite beings abstractly and uniformly. His love informs their concrete acts of existence, the way that they go about being their particular selves. This unceasing theophany becomes evident to those who strive to make the love of God (*theophilia*)

84 W. Norris Clarke, S.J., *Person and Being* (Milwaukee, 2004), pp. 16–17.
85 Maximus, *Selected Writings*, p. 220, #69.
86 PG91:685BC.
87 PG91:685C.
88 Louth, *Maximus*, pp. 40–41.

rather than the love of self (*philautia*) the measure of perception.[89] Love is the dispassionate (*apatheia*), selfless surrender to the being of things in the course of which their inherent *logoi* or actualizing reasons are revealed and seen in their integral being.[90] It is this *holy singularity* that Christian art is called to realize within its own domain.

When creatures are perceived spiritually or in a God-loving manner (*theophilos*), they are seen in their true nature and subsistence, as his living (incarnating) works.[91] When, by contrast, they are perceived from the standpoint of desire or self-love (*philautia*), this vital, animating reality in them disappears and the mind imposes its own self-serving and distorted reasons (*physikos tes eautou proskeitai logous*) on things.[92] When art draws its subjects from the realm of an "unloving" conceptuality, its beings become illustrators of ideas or worse still, their intellective shadows. From a Maximian standpoint, this is an aesthetic of self-indulgence. The passions obscure the inherent divinity and sanctity of creation and it is therefore in their activities rather than in the things themselves that evil arises.

> … in applying itself to visible things the mind knows them in accordance with nature through the medium of the senses, so that neither is the mind evil, nor is natural knowledge, nor the things, nor the senses (*aestheseis*), for these are all works (*erga*) of God. What then is evil? Evidently it is the passion of natural representation (*pathos kata physin noematos*) …

Perception finds its true object when the "according to nature" (*kata physin*) is replaced with what we might call the "according to God" (*kata Theon*). We then see things from the standpoint of the Trinitarian mystery, and grasp in the distinct particularity of their being the choreography of the divine essence. They now appear as mysterious and sacrosanct beings, free from our own intentions and yet yielding to them—in reciprocity to the love that makes them what they are and in which their particularity finds its fruitional moments. This is the station of the saint who stands still (*hesychos*), attentive and humble before creation and allows it to reveal itself in its full being.

> The one who is not attached to the things of this world (*o me paschon pros ta tou kosmou*) loves stillness (*hesychia*); the one who does not love (*agapon*) anything human loves all human beings (*pantas anthropous*).[93]

With great subtlety Maximus captures the predicament of the self-loving person—who struggles in pain against other beings (*paschon pros ta tou kosmou*)—and experiences them in a false particularity determined by desire.

[89] "Self-love … is the cause of all passionate thoughts." "The beginning of all passions is love of self." The term is defined as "irrational love for the body." PG90:III.56, 57.

[90] PG90:I.93, 95.

[91] PG90:IV.10.

[92] Maximus likens these thoughts to those of parents who influenced by affection for their offspring find them good or beautiful when they are quite the opposite. PG90:III.58.

[93] PG90:III.37. The translation is mine.

By contrast, love that has God as its starting point enters deeply into the being of things and persons and loves them not by abstraction (e.g., humanity) but in a concrete, hypostatic love exercised on a simultaneously universal and particular scale (for each and every human being)—a love made possible (as is its accompanying vision) by divine grace.

> The mind (*nous*) of the one who loves God (*theophilous*) does not engage in battle (*polemei*) against things (*pros ta pragmata*) nor against their representations (*noemata*), but against the passions joined to the representations (*ta tes noemasi synezeugmena*).[94]

Things themselves and what our senses and intellect make of them in pictures, words or figures of any kind are holy to the lover of God and unholy to the narcissist. Iconoclasm, to the extent that it denies the reflection of divinity in sensuous form, is a type of narcissism (*philautia*), an attempt to take possession for the self of the God who belongs equally (in love) to all creation.

Maximian theology engages the world from inside Christ's mystical body. To speak of God (*theologo*) is to speak of being (*ontologo*) but not externally as if one thought *over* its existence.[95] Here *episteme* takes another dimension, another life. Mystically, by divine grace, the intellect enters and lingers in the being of things—it buries itself in them—and finds there the One who loves them and empties himself for their sake. Knowledge of God and being stems from such acts of ontic immersion, a form of reverence or *eusebeia* to which beings respond (reciprocate) by surrendering themselves—and the Creator who loves them and inheres in them—to the knowing mind.

To approach reality in this manner requires a refinement and instruction of the senses (*aesthesin didaxein*): one must be able to see beyond the material and finite being of things and cease subjecting them to a superficial and groundless relationality (*ton pros ti … xronoi kai topoi*).[96] Impossible for those who "live as beasts on the level of sense alone" (*ktenodos monen ten aesthesin zontes*), this kind of perception is the mark of souls that turn reverently (*eusebos*) to the world and celebrate the "magnificence" (*megaleioteta*) of its *logoi*.[97] Implicit in this juxtaposition is the configuration of the Cross: the humbler (and more reverent) the viewer, the more sublime the vision.

Eusebeia describes the spiritual and intellectual disposition in a person that allows them to form images "untainted" (*akeratois*) by the coarse materiality of things and to therefore see (*phantazesthai*) the visible (*oraton*) world in its true form.[98] It is an ascetic virtue with an inherent aesthetic dimension. Maximus likens the "humble and sincere" (*tapeinophron kai aplastos*) ascetic to a farmer

94 PG90:III.40.

95 To the early Fathers *theologo* described the intellect's engagement with the living God (e.g., to Evagrius it meant an intellect totally receptive to the divine reality). Raitt, pp. 1–33.

96 PG:1108C, 1109A.

97 PG90:1144B, 1149CD, 1109A, 1088BC.

98 PG90:1088BC, 1096A.

who "transplants as a wild tree the sense contemplation (*pros aesthesin theorian*) of visible things into the region of the spiritual (*noeton choran*) and who finds a treasure: the manifestation by grace of the wisdom (*kata charin phanerosin sophias*) which is in beings."[99]

Here, spiritual contemplation rediscovers a lost vitality in things. Rather than abandon the sensible world, one reconstitutes it as the domain of charismatic existence and sanctification. "Those who deal rightly and piously with beings (*met'eusebeias tois ousi*) and who conceive no sort of love of ostentation (*medena philendeixias tropon epinoountes*) will find coming to meet them (*proypantosas*) their most precise apprehension (*akrivestaten katalepsin*)."[100] As humility gradually removes the obstructive structures of self-love (*philautia*), grace (*kata charin*) brings about the realization of the inherent holiness of creation. It takes the form of an intense ontological communion between the perceiver's unceasing (*apaustos*), intimate (*peira*) and active (*kat'energeian*) participation (*methexei*) in the being of things, and their reciprocal, welcoming (*proypantosas*) movement in her direction.[101] Maximus describes this state as "falling suddenly (*aphno prospesousa*) through humility (*dia ten tapeinosin*) on the ascetic who did not expect it"; it is a pouring of "divine sights" (*gnosis theion theorematon katakla*) withheld from those who make a spectacle of mortification (*pros epideixin meta kamatou kai ponou*).[102]

Finite substances are enveloped in the divine mystery and it is in their midst that theology takes shape. Concepts live in things and have things live in them. "*Being*," Maximus writes, "*becomes the teacher of theology*." It is important to consider this phrase in the context in which it appears:

> For what the pure mind naturally sees with reverent knowledge (*eusebous gnoseos*) this, they say, it can also experience, becoming this itself in accordance with the habit of virtue. Thus being becomes the teacher of theology (*ousian theologias einai didaskalon*). Through it we, seeking the source of all things, teach through them (*di'auton*) that He is … Movement is indicative of the providence of beings (*ten de kinesin tes ton onton pronoias einai ekfantiken*). Through it we behold *the unvarying sameness of each of the things that have come to be according to its being and form and similarly its inviolable mode of existence* (*ten kat'ousian ekastou kat'eidos aparallakton*

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99 PG90:1089AB.

100 PG90:1092A.

101 PG90:1089C, 1092A. *Maximi Confessoris Quaestiones ad Thallasium II*, ed. Carl Laga and Carolos Steel (Leuven, 1990), p. 77. Maximus, *On the Cosmic Mystery*, p. 126. On the restoration of the integrity of the natural world in Maximus, see Andrew Louth, "The Transfiguration in the Theology of St. Maximus the Confessor," in Raitt, pp. 20–33. Contrast Maximian *eusebeia* with the interior and exterior illusions generated by pride (*hyperephaneia*) in Climacus' *Ladder* (PG88:22) and the distorted appearance of a person suffering from envy, described in stark physiognomic detail by St. Basil of Caesarea in his homily *On Envy*. Vasiliki Limberis, "The Eyes Infected by Evil: Basil of Caesarea's Homily *On Envy*," *Harvard Theological Review*, 84/2 (1991): pp. 163–184. For example: "The envious bend their heads forward in dejection. Confusion and suffering are their chief characteristics. They have 'dry, unlit eyes, sunken cheeks, and contracted eyebrows'."

102 PG90:1089C.

tautoteta kai osautos aparencheiton diexagogen), and understand how everything in the universe is separated one from another in an orderly manner in accordance with the *logoi* in which each thing (*ekasta*) consists by the ineffable One who holds and protects everything in accordance with unity (emphasis added).[103]

The Maximian universe is one of relationship and activity where things submit to God's acting lovingly through their being—both internally, in their unique natures, and externally in their existence and in the distinct ways in which they relate to other beings and to themselves.[104] Maximus does not tire of repeating that this cosmic movement allows each being to be itself in the fullest sense possible: nothing about the existence of even the smallest being is insignificant or bereft of dignity. This is the meaning of the phrase "its inviolable mode of existence."

Thus one is a theologian who reaches out to things in order to see in them the enhypostasizing presence of divinity—the Trinitarian mystery at work in every possible corner of creation.[105] Whether probing Scripture in search of the living Christ—turning word into flesh (*sarx*)—or the world in search of God's spirit (*pneuma*)—turning things into ideas (*leptynomenos*)—theology is expected to bring about a new vision of reality, to be ontological in the most profound and radical sense of the word.[106] This vision has aesthetic implications both in terms of its grandeur and of its subtlety.

In Maximus, the stillness and specularity of the Areopagite universe is left behind. A world in which beings are dynamically and distinctly (as *tropoi*) realizing their *logoi* cannot be locked or immobilized in images that merely simulate their sensible forms.[107] Its iconography must instead turn to the divine acts of love, to the great mystery that operates within creatures and is manifested in their acts of existence, and bring that existence to life in its own terms. Like theology, (Christian) art turns to being for instruction.

Wherever the theological eye turns, things naturally submit (*physikos hypomenousin*) themselves to circumscription (*perigraphe*) through their *archai* and *logoi*.[108] They are called "subjects" (*hypokeimenon*) because they have inside them the self-deprecating power to become objects of knowledge (*auto ten tou noeisthai ten dynamin echon*), to surrender their being to thought in order to free it from those acts of self-love that plague the intellectual life (and so much of postmodern thought).[109] This interior movement of things toward intelligent form or expression, suggests a potential for even higher levels of activity (*energeian*)—and submission—an eschatological trajectory

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103 *Difficulty 10*, PG91:1133BC.

104 Loudovikos writes of a "Eucharistic dialogue" between beings and God. Loudovikos, *Orthodoxia*, p. 73.

105 The restoration of the integrity of the natural state is the aim of asceticism. Louth, "The Transfiguration in the Theology of St. Maximus the Confessor," pp. 22–23.

106 PG90:1141CD–1144A.

107 Louth, *Maximus*, pp. 51, 57–58.

108 PG90:1085CD.

109 PG90:1116BC.

toward divinization. Thus their circumscription, their containment in form, is never total but instead leaves them open to transformation, to becoming more of what they are at any given moment of their existence.

The same movement informs language. Things that are called by their names (*logon kategoroumenon*) yield to verbal circumscription and by engaging in this act of surrender (and containment) to the human voice, they assume hypostatic being. But speech also sanctifies by inducting beings into a fuller participation in the divine Word in which all voices inhere. All creatures thus called or named enter the divine life.[110] Theological perception reveals a world whose vibrant existence and acts of self-articulation point to its tranquil and ineffable creator—the God who rests (*pauetai gar o Theos*).[111] In all things a tension is visible between expression and silence, movement and stillness, immanence and transcendence—as we have also seen in Maximus' mystical iconography of the Cross.

Art is mystical ontology. If by *hypokeimenon* we understand the ground out of which a being comes to exist in itself and therefore as a substance, then it is not things that art should pursue but instead those acts in which they subsist. It is, in other words, *how* a thing brings itself to being what it is, the entire drama of self-creation and self-expression of substance that is art's concern. By making this dynamic aspect of substance its object, art moves from the domain of imitation to that of communication and communion.

Things, as Maximus tells us, release their *logoi* only when they are treated as beings that are actively engaged in them, as self-expressive entities worthy of being heard and seen. In terms of the distinction between *ousia* and *tropoi*, one must become attentive and receptive to those ways or expressions proper to their nature in which things actualize their essence. Discerning between the *tropoi* that elucidate a thing's nature and those that obscure it (when a thing or being, for instance, acts or is made to act contrary to its nature) is an important part of this process. The self-creative aspect in a being's existence is associated with the former, the self-destructive aspect with the latter.

This act of expressing itself and bringing part of its being forth, presupposes plenitude in the thing itself, a deeper and more complete substratum of being out of which this act and its contents proceed. This is the ineffable *hypokeimenon*, the suffering and patient (*hypomenousin*) subject that lies at the depth of all beings and, if we follow Maximus' language, recalls the suffering and silent Christ of the Cross—the *Logos* who is the substance of all creation. Thus substance is never fully expressed as form or figure because in every single act of a thing's expression a silence arises which points to something in it that is not being heard or seen in its entirety. It is on this basis that we draw the distinction between communication and communion—in Greek *epikoinonia* and *koinonia* respectively.

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110 PG90:1101A.

111 PG90:1100BC.

A being's particular act of expression at any given moment of its existence is an act of communication in which it puts forth a "voice" or "image" of its nature. The configuration in one such act of the totality of its nature in silence (*hesychia*), as presence (*parousia*), is an act of interior communion (*koinonia*), by grace, with the ineffable totality of its being. Here, presence is the existence of the totality of a substance in one of its particular moments. An image in which this movement is evident has *enargeia* in that it gives sensible expression to the emergence of a thing or person out of its very own being. This meaning is reflected in *Mystagogy* where the term is used to describe the coinherence of divine (*en auto meinai … kai autos en hymin*) and human natures in the deified person who instead of being at odds with her finitude (*ekstenai*), experiences it (*peira*, *pathein*) through the eternal plenitude (*aei plerestaton*) and truth (*to eu einai*) of Christ.[112] In such instances, Maximus explains, one knows *enargos*, with vivid clarity, the dignity inherent in the human person (*gnorisas enargos to axioma*).[113]

This experience is described in the language of mysticism and communion between Christ and those that love him: "Jesus my God and Savior, who is completed by me who am saved, brings me back to himself who is always filled to overflowing with plenitude and who can never be exhausted."[114] Beings that are "restored" (*apokathistesi*) through divine communion become in that instance of their existence exemplary icons of their own kind: "there is rendered to the image, what is made in the image (*apodidotai te eikoni to kat'eikona*)."[115]

When a being's subsistence is entirely determined by its essence, it becomes iconic to itself in the sense that it encompasses (outlines) in its particular acts of existence its own nature and in so doing exists perspicuously and conspicuously to itself. Iconicity in this context is not mere likeness (and verisimilitude). It is an act of self-realization: a being's *performance* of its truth. Neither is *enargeia* mere vividness. It is an act of self-circumscription: a being's dynamic possession of its truth. An image has *enargeia*, then, to the extent that it participates in the act of self-realization that it imparts on its own objects, a participation that is never objective but remains its mysterious ground. This it does by infusing them with the natures that they are actualizing in their particular acts of existence and with the energy to exist in that modality. In the absence of this grounding movement, vividness becomes a mere plastic quality that is attached to an object as a means of enhancing its presence and therefore its significance in the composition.

Two examples should help us appreciate this distinction better. Both paintings have as their subject St. Anthony the Abbot (c. 251–356). The first is by Francisco de Zurbaran (Figure 9.1).

112 PG91:676B.
113 PG91:676BC.
114 PG91:676B.
115 PG91:676BC.



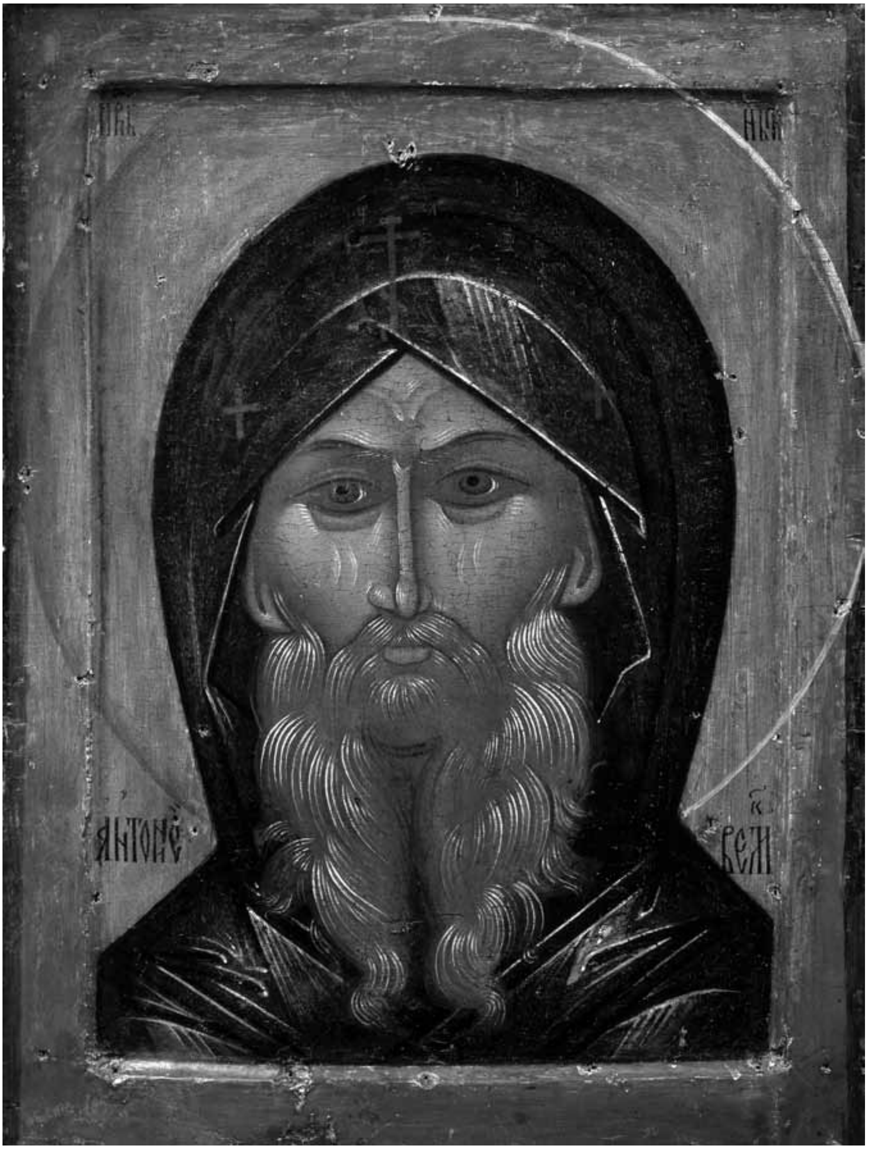
9.1 Francisco de Zurbaran, *Saint Anthony Abbot*, after 1640, Uffizi, Florence, Italy

The Saint is enveloped in his monastic vestments which are soft and thick in texture, with heavy folds and a solid, sculptured appearance. Set in a landscape that does not suggest a desert or wilderness, with lush trees and foliage in the background, brown tones and a sepia sky, the elderly figure bends gently forward gesturing toward the sky, leaning on a wooden staff. More than his sun-burned face and disheveled hair and beard, and his inquisitive, supplicating expression, it is the impeccable, heavy vestments that stand out and dominate the frame begging interpretation (e.g., the monastic office, the weight of solitude and penance, the proximity to earth). Thus, rather than bring out the distinctive being of a saint in his act of prayer or in his ascetic existence (whatever specific form that might take) and present his vestments as their integral expression, the image works inversely and presents the person through the aesthetically enhanced forms of a position or ecclesiastical office. The contrast between the expressive face and the nearly monumental garments is hard to miss as is the eccentricity of placing or perhaps transplanting this figure in such an idyllic environment.

Like other paintings of ascetics from the Byzantine tradition, the Russian icon of Figure 9.2, with highlights reminiscent of the frescos of Theophanes the Greek, eliminates all spatial and temporal references and concentrates on the Saint's face.[116] There are visible differences with the previous image which obviously lacks this "iconic" quality, making it necessary to limit our comparison to those elements that the two works share. The black hood frames a delicate face that seems suspended between its angular edges which yield to its quiet energy. It covers and perhaps circumscribes its bearer but it does not contain him. Round in shape with angular openings, it stands loose and still over the neck and ears in the manner of a gaping shroud, enhancing the warm colors of the man's face and highlighted, sculpted beard and his intense gaze which seems lost in contemplation or prayer. Here the garment is an integral part of ascetic existence, as its highlights match those of the man's beard and face, creating a unitive rhythm within the image that is suggestive of both exterior and interior illumination. The asymmetrical eyes are alert but also sensitive. The image is making itself present with the same simplicity and ease with which it renders the features of its subject.

The figure in this icon exists ascetically in all of its aspects—including the absence of ostentatious plastic qualities (consistent with humility). Its austere and simple garment does not exist separately from the face and beard with which it shares not only the delicate and stylized illumination but also that pronounced stillness and lightness that gives to both an air of transience and permanence. It is thus intimate to the man with whose face its own being is aligned. Instead of functioning as a symbol or sign of the monastic state or office, it becomes the companion of the one who lives in it and whose life it shares. Despite its simplicity, the image is vivid because

[116] Two such icons from the Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt are discussed in Evans, pp. 383–384.



9.2 *St. Anthony the Great*, 16th century, Russian State Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia

everything in it exists ascetically and thus enhypostasizes its subject. This movement is absent from the Spanish painting. The man's face, his soft and well-groomed hands and luminous eyes have an air of mundane sentimentality unmatched by the impersonal and imposing cassock and hood which here have a life of their own as if they will continue to exist for other bodies that will live in them or even as plastic beings in their own right—a marvel of form, texture and color.

The aesthetic implications of Maximian theology deserve a more systematic examination than is possible in this study. The *hesychastic* tradition on which his writings continue to exercise such influence is an

equally untapped source for the study of the Christian image. But there is one area where the aesthetic vision of this theology has always found expression: in the exemplary icons that the Eastern Church has created in its long and creative dialogue with the aesthetic legacy of Hellenism and with its own experience of things divine. Here many voices have a place and we turn next to St. John Damascene, the last of the Greek Fathers, whose theology of the image remains to this day the principal text for the study of Orthodox iconology during and after Iconoclasm.

10

The Image in St. John Damascene

Damascene lived in Syria, in an Arab Muslim environment dominated by an opposition to images and away from the major centers of Byzantine art and culture which he never visited. He wrote theology with the sensibility of a man of letters and if we are to judge by his hymnography, of a poet. Given the classical education that he received in his youth and the prominent position of his family in the Umayyad court, it is safe to assume that he was not altogether unfamiliar with the visual arts.[1]

As its title implies, *In Defense of Holy Icons* is a polemical text. Its aesthetics is defined largely by this objective. Damascene's reliance on patristic authorities makes his views on the subject canonical. The *Defense* treats images as visual statements or descriptions and assigns to them an auxiliary role in liturgy and worship defined by their holy archetypes. The author occasionally recognizes presence and animation in paintings, and appears familiar with aesthetic canons known since Greek antiquity. But his theological treatment of the image is not significantly affected by these considerations.

Damascene adopts the Areopagite view of dissimilar signification according to which, as we have seen, all nature is a divine simile and beings the signs of transcendent realities.[2] "*Eikon*," "*morphe*," "*charaktir*," "*ektypoma*," "*graphe*," are used indiscriminately to refer to painted figures and words. Damascene's understanding of painting is reflected in the formula "write in words and colors" (see below), variations of which are repeated in the text.[3] It is based on the idea that to write a word is to give visual form to what it names: "the letter pictures (*eikonizei*) the word."[4] He draws no clear distinction between writing and painting, and repeatedly returns to the notion that words describe in letters what pictures describe in colors and shapes. Painting may bring color and vividness to things but it is in all other respects inferior to the spoken and written word.

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1 Louth, *St. John Damascene*, pp. 5–6.
2 PG94:1269AB.
3 PG94:1240AB, 1341D.
4 Ibid.

The *Defense* shows little interest in the aesthetic qualities of pictures. What matters most and for largely theological reasons is their physical nature. The Incarnation fills matter with "divine energy and grace" and makes it worthy of reverence.[5] This affects all the materials (pigments, panels etc.) that the painter uses to craft an image and in this manner sanctifies the art of painting. God takes the form of a human being—an act of self-representation that painting to a degree simulates. Damascene's ontology is very different from that of Maximus. In Damascene, pictures signify divine realities; in Maximus, they incorporate and express them. A comparison of a passage from the *Defense* with a very similar passage from Maximus' *Difficulties* should make this clear. According to Damascene:

> God, therefore, not wishing that we should be completely ignorant of the incorporeal beings, bestowed on them (*perietheken*) figures (*typous*) and shapes (*schemata*) and images (*eikonas*) that bear some analogy with our nature (*analogian tes phuseos*), bodily shapes seen by the immaterial sight of the intellect, and we depict these beings and give them shapes, just as the cherubim were depicted (*eschematisthe*) and given shapes (*eikonisthe*). But Scripture has shapes and images (*schemata*, *eikonas*) of God too.[6]

The idea of God as a painter links theophany with written and painted pictures. Angelophanies are one example of the divine art. Accounts of angels in Scripture and pictures of them in art copy the work of divine hands (like an *acheiropoietos*). But all are sensibles that conceal insensibles. The purpose of form is to deliver what it contains (*perietheken*) to sight. Form and content co-exist, they do not mix. Thus, the aesthetic dimension of the image, which rests on the creative fusion or synergy of the two aspects, disappears. Showing that images have a place in the divine life comes at a price. The image will always point beyond itself, to the one who made it possible. Once its content is deciphered or grasped intellectually, the rest of it, the image as such, can be discarded.

Maximus uses a similar analogy involving theophany but the difference is readily apparent. He describes Christ as "coming to be next to us, for us and to us, thickened in a body, in syllables and letters for the sake of our senses" (*os ton kath'emas, di'emas pros emas genomenon dia somatos kai syllavais kai grammasi pachuthenta dia ten aesthesin*).[7] Words that were once only heard and seen are now lived and come alive. The divine body utters itself and can be read and seen in its spoken and written life. Words do not anymore allude to his presence; they are actual instances of it. Expression and presence replace symbolism and allusion.[8] Language acquires a depth and mystery that it did

5 PG94:1245AB.

6 PG94:1346A. Compare with Maximus' *Difficulties*, PG91:1129B.

7 PG91:1129D.

8 Ladner's conclusion that "the Byzantines saw the things of nature only as accompanying symbols within a vast cosmic liturgy performed by Christ and by hierarchies of angels and men, and represented by the sacred icons" applies to Damascene but not to Maximus. Ladner, "The Concept of the Image in the Greek Fathers."

not have before. The movement from signification to existence recalls the enhancing (*auxesis*) presence of divine grace in creation and human experience that we discussed in the previous chapter.[9]

Maximus' language underscores the creative energy of the Incarnation. Christ enters matter and transforms it from within instead of merely impressing it with his presence or form from the outside. The idea of a divine being engaged in an expressive act that involves the vital motions of a breathing and speaking body is consistent with the iconic conceptuality that informs Maximus' writing and the spiritual dynamism of his theology. In the Maximian cosmos, ciphers and symbols, allegories and stories, cannot fully express Christ's profound and perpetual presence in creation. Only actual beings can. This, as we shall see, is not the case for Damascene. The image is a semblance, a necessary form for the appearance of the divine but never a being in its own right. It is a transient manifestation of divine presence much like the reflection of an object in a mirror.

The *Defense* consists of a protracted theological argument complete with florilegia and appeals to Patristic authority, embellished with poetic and homiletic interludes that extol images and express the author's deep devotion to them. Celebrated in Byzantium and in the Orthodox world to this day for his liturgical poetry, Damascene does not hesitate to deliver his arguments in terms more akin to his own piety and hymnography than to the nature of the object he sets out to defend.[10] His laudation in the Liturgy of his feast day (December 4) as a "sweetly speaking (*glykorremon*)" David, whose verse "sweetens both hearing and the reasoning mind" and places him among "the orders of angels," is an example of the dominance of *ekphrasis* in Orthodox hagiographies.[11] This is also Damascene's style when he frequently interrupts his theological arguments to praise images. By contrast, Maximus' rhetoric reflects the complexity of the mystical realities whose logic he sets out to describe, and has no use for colorful language and hyperbole.

Damascene's view of Scripture as an iconic form of Christ recalls imagery used by the great poet and theologian of Syriac Christianity, St. Ephrem the Syrian (c. 306–373). In his *Hymn on Paradise*, God has "clothed Himself" in metaphors in order to become accessible to human understanding.[12] Scripture "is a book which, above its companions, has in its narrative, made the Creator perceptible."[13] The sacred word has pictographic and anagogical

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[9] PG90:1096C.

[10] Louth, *St. John Damascene*, pp. 252–253.

[11] Constantine Papayiannis (ed.), *Anthologion ton Ieron Akolouthion tou Olou Eniautou* (An Anthology of Holy Services) (2 vols, Thessaloniki: Orthodoxos Kypseli, 1993), vol. 2, pp. 859–860.

[12] *Hymn on Paradise*, XI 6–7. St. Emphrem the Syrian, *Saint Ephrem: Hymns on Paradise*, trans. Sebastian Brock (Crestwood, 1990), pp. 48–49, 156. Names, metaphors, symbols and types are forms of divine disclosure. They contain the "hidden power" of meaning of the object they symbolize. Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem the Syrian* (Kalamazoo, 1985), pp. 41–42.

[13] *Hymn on Paradise*, XI 6; VI 1. *Saint Ephrem: Hymns on Paradise*, 156, 108–109.

powers. "Scripture brought me," he writes in the same hymn, "to the gate of Paradise."[14] In *Letter to Publius*, Ephrem describes Scripture as an animated mirror which "reproduces the image of everyone who gazes at it and the likeness of everyone who peers into it."[15] Ephrem's metaphors and analogies can be intricate and provocative. The following passage from the *Letter* extols the creative, expressive and paradoxical nature of the sacred Word: "Although it is silent, it speaks/Although it is mute, it cries out/ … Although it is still, it dances/Although it has no belly, its womb is of great expanse."[16] Deep in its "hidden inner chambers" the animated and almost corporeal biblical text generates and maps "with undetectable quickness" images of "every limb … and every body."[17]

Damascene is not quite as dramatic and mystical as Ephrem. This is understandable since his principal task is to show that the Incarnation legitimizes painting and justifies the use of images in worship. He is not interested in the aesthetic character of the Christian image. The *Defense* accords images only an elemental aesthetic subsistence (mainly colors and shapes)—what is sufficient to render a simple likeness of a thing or person or to replicate the types and figures described in Scripture. Images are either visual equivalents of words or replicas of things.[18]

The relationship between the three persons of the Trinity resembles the way in which ideas become pictures: the Holy Spirit is the image of the Son who is the image of the Father.[19] An invisible (*aoraton*), immeasurable (*amegethos*), incorporeal (*asomaton*) and formless (*aneideon*) God assumes visible human form in the person of Jesus.[20] God is the prototype (*prototypon*) of which the Son is the *eikon* or likeness. This act of divine art expresses God's love for humanity (*philanthropos*).[21] One can see the Father in and through the Son just like an object is visible in and through its reflection in a mirror or in copy in a picture. It follows that Christians should not despise art for drawing attention to the material world and the senses since this is also how God draws attention to his Triune mystery through Christ. For Damascene, a picture depicts in the

14 *Hymn on Paradise* VI 1. *Saint Ephrem: Hymns on Paradise*, 109.

15 St. Ephrem the Syrian, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works*, ed. Kathleen McVey, trans. E.G. Matthews Jr. and J.P. Amar (Washington D.C., 1994), pp. 3–5, 55, 338.

16 Ibid., p. 339.

17 Ibid.

18 PG94:1337AB.

19 PG94:1340AD.

20 PG94:1236BC, 1237D–1240A.

21 PG94:1240C, 1261A. *Philanthropia* appears in similar context in Pseudo-Dionysius, in *The Divine Names*. Damascene actually quotes Dionysius at 1260BC: "Into this we have been initiated: now analogously, through the divine veils of the scriptural and priestly traditions, [God's] love for human kind (*philanthropias*) covers intelligible things by that which can be perceived by the senses and things beyond being by the things that are, and provides forms and figures for what is formless and without figure, and makes manifold and gives form to simplicity that is beyond nature and shape in a multitude of separate symbols." See *The Divine Names*, PG3:592AB. Maximus, *On the Cosmic Mystery*, p. 40. See also Dionysius (Pseudo), *Pseudo-Dionysius*, p. 52.

same way that a mental image presents and a sentence states.[22] It serves as an aid to memory (*hypomnema gar estin e eikon*).[23] Before words are heard and images are seen, they are formed in the mind (*noetos de enoumetha*).[24] They are a natural part of how we perceive and understand things. The argument here is from cognition. To remember Christ is to put him in some kind of sign or picture or mental object. There is no fundamental difference between thinking of him and painting him.

This is a good argument but it does not quite respond to the Iconoclast challenge. Painting was acceptable as long as it was not God that was being painted. Iconoclasts had no problem with secular art, as we have seen. Thus, the problem for them was not the portrayal of Christ the man. It was the portrayal of Christ the Man-God. The Iconoclast position included an aesthetic thesis: the depiction of Christ's divinity goes beyond the abilities of art. We can think of the divinity of Christ but we cannot put that idea in a painting. We paint what we see; the unseen we do not paint. This is very similar to the Modernist problem. The solution for some avant-gardes was to make the image signify sublime realities through its plastic qualities rather than its content (i.e., as representation).

Damascene's solution was to present painting as a form of writing, to hide the image behind the word and use the unquestionable authority of the Gospel text and the rhetoric of *ekphraseis* to justify its existence:

> Depict (*charatte pinaki*) his ineffable descent, his birth from the Virgin, his being baptized in the Jordan, his transfiguration on Tabor, what he endured to secure our freedom from passion, the miracles, symbols of his divine nature, performed by the divine activity through the activity of the flesh, the saving cross, the tomb, the resurrection, the ascent into heaven. Depict (*graphe*) all these in words and colors (*logo kai chromasi*).[25]

The listing of events from the life of Christ has a homiletic tone. The painter is a homilist who like a good orator depicts his subject in a vivid, colorful way. If the homilist paints in words, why shouldn't the painter speak in pictures?

Damascene takes St. Basil's analogy "we will display with words (*logo*) the way we would with pictures (*graphe*)" and gives it a tighter reading: "the work (*ergon*) of word (*logou*) and picture (*eikonos*) is one and the same."[26] Basil's statement is an accurate description of *ekphrasis*. The good orator turns words into pictures. Painters (*zoographoi*) and writers (*logographoi*), adds Damascene, "signify" (*diasemainousin*) the same things in different ways: painting makes visible through imitation (*mimeseos*) what writing makes audible through hearing.[27] If hearing a word and seeing its referent

22 PG94:1248C.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 PG94:1240AB, 1341D–1344A. Maximus, *On the Cosmic Mystery*, p. 24.
26 PG94:1265D.
27 PG94:1267A. Maximus, *On the Cosmic Mystery*, pp. 45–46.

is the orator's success, the painter's success is exactly the same (except that no sound is required). As in Simonides' famous phrase (but with a slight variation), pictures according to Basil are silent speech. The difference between a homilist and a painter is technical. The content and effect remains the same:

> Moreover both writers of words (*logographoi*) and painters (*zographoi*) many times describe clearly human deeds of valor in war, the former adorning them with rhetoric (*to logo kosmountes*), the latter inscribing them on tablets, and both arousing many to deeds of excellence. For what the word of a story makes present through hearing, the very same is shown silently in a picture through imitation (*sioposa dia mimeseos*).[28]

It is important to notice the comparison between the embellishments (*kosmountes*) of rhetoric and representation in painting.[29] Both are acts of veneration directed to the holy figures they represent. There is little concern here about how veneration is expressed or shown in the image. It is the act and content of representation that expresses reverence, not its form. It is assumed that the figure depicted is immediately recognizable (as are the events in Christ's life and the characters and places of the Gospel).

On Basil's authority, Damascene presents two strong arguments in defense of images: one from the Gospel and one from rhetoric. The Gospel has already told the story of Christ to no objection for its use of ordinary words. Hymnography has done the same and conveyed profound theological truths. *Ekphraseis* too have been painting with words for centuries (and no one objected). To transfer the same function to painting is logical and harmless. Perhaps he was thinking of the educated hierarchs who found the popular cult of images distasteful but readily appreciated the use of powerful oratory. Damascene has rhetoric come to the rescue of the Christian image—which in part explains his own abundant use of *ekphrastic* writing in the *Defense*. But the aesthetic question remains unanswered. What will these *ekphrastic* images look like? And can they show the full Christ?

Damascene believes that the conversion from statement to picture is fairly easy. We know that it is not. It is one thing to state something; another to translate it visually. Words may bring images to one's mind and in this sense they may be said to paint, but painting has its own rules and the analogy to speech breaks down the moment painting begins. Having read Balzac's description of a "white tablecloth, like a covering of snow newly fallen, from which rose symmetrically, the plates and napkins crowned with light-colored rolls," the young Cezanne wanted to paint it.[30] He realized

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[28] PG94:1267A.

[29] Ibid. See also Basil, *Homily on Gordius the Martyr*, PG31:501B; *Homily on the 40 Martyrs of Sebaste*, PG31:524C.

[30] M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London, 1962), pp. 197–198.

eventually that only some words mattered to the painter. The rest were not about painting but about literature.[31] We cannot expect Damascene to think this way since he was not a painter. But lack of understanding of how painting works seriously undermined his iconology.

When he writes, for example, "I do not depict the invisible divinity, but I depict God made visible in the flesh (*ou ten aoraton eikonizo theoteta, all'eikonizo Theou ten oratheisan sarka*)," the distinction is mute.[32] Of course we paint what we see and we paint physical things. But in Christ some saw divinity directly (e.g., in the Baptism, Transfiguration and post-Resurrection encounters) while others saw it through his miracles. If he is to be painted "in the flesh," we cannot paint him as we would an ordinary person. Neither can we exclude the theophanic episodes from the iconography of his life. It is not the invisible Christ that we are called to paint but the Christ in whom the invisible-becomes-visible (the divine-becomes-human). The Iconoclasts said that this was an impossible thing to show in a picture. Damascene saw the same limitations and redefined the image in rhetorical terms, shifting attention away from its composition to the emotional and edifying effect it has on the viewer.

Damascene's commentary on the Basil passage that we quoted earlier is especially interesting. It shows how the Christian image becomes a rhetorical object. First, its resemblance to a written description is confirmed. A picture makes present what writing cannot show. It cannot be read and heard but it can be experienced just as intensely visually. The viewer's piety and devotion are not disrupted by the presence of the holy person in painted form (we may recall that this is a problem in ascetic prayer and contemplation). On the contrary, they are enhanced. Aesthetic qualities are recognized in this context but only to the extent that they fit the spiritual response they are expected to elicit. The luster of the image corresponds to the fervor it inspires. It glows and glitters; the viewer's soul is on fire.

What could demonstrate more clearly than these passages, that images are books for the illiterate and silent heralds of the honor of the saints, teaching those who see with a soundless voice (*en aecho phone*) and sanctifying the sight (*ten orasen aghiazousai*)? I may not have many books, nor have much time to read, but, strangled with thoughts, as if with thorns, I come into the common surgery of the soul (*psuchon iatrion*), the church; the luster of the painting (*tes graphes to anthos*) draws me to vision and delights my sight like a meadow (*leimon*) and imperceptibly introduces my soul to the glory of God. I have seen the perseverance of the martyr, the recompense of the crown, and as if by fire (*puri*) I am eagerly kindled to zeal, and falling down I venerate God through the martyr and I receive salvation. What do you say? Shall I not paint (*grapso*) in words and in colors (*logo kai chromasi*) the martyrdom of the martyrs and embrace

31 He wrote: "Literature expresses itself by abstractions, whereas painting by means of drawing and color gives concrete shape to sensations and perceptions." Chipp, p. 20.

32 PG94:1236C. Unless otherwise indicated, English translation is from St. John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, trans. Andrew Louth (Crestwood, 2003), p. 22.

(*periptyxomai*) with eyes and lips 'what is wonderful to angels and the whole creation, painful to the devil and fearful to demons,' as the same beacon of the Church (Saint Basil) said?[33]

The actual aesthetic aspect of the image is here conveyed by "*anthos*," a classical term used by the Byzantines to describe the brightness and saturation of color (*chroma*), especially in the human face and skin (*chros*).[34] Painting is writing in color. Color animates the content of a picture in the same way that the human voice animates the text that is being read or performed. John Chrysostom had written: "for as long as somebody traces the outline as in a drawing, there remains a sort of shadow; but when he paints over it brilliant tints and lays on colors then an image appears."[35] When the human voice enters into the vowels, consonants and diphthongs of a word and reads it aloud, it has the same effect on them as color does when it is added to a drawing. Four hundred years later, Mesarites brings a mosaic depicting the miracle of the draught of fishes to life on "the wings of speech" (*logou pterois*).[36] Color is painting's voice.

For Damascene, color justifies the existence of images because it affects so powerfully the soul—something that writing can also do but only indirectly, through the imagination. Through color, painting calms the mind that is tormented (literally strangled) by temptations (*akanthais tois logismois sympnigomenos*) by putting it in the presence of lively models of sainthood. Thus art can heal. The saints' vivid and brilliant appearance is then transferred to the soul in the form of spiritual fervor and it is immediately reciprocated. It puts it on fire (*pyri*). *Pyrauges* or fiery suggests shimmering or gleaming hues, particularly red.[37] Instead of pointing to the material world and causing sinful thoughts, paintings soothe the soul, surround it with holy figures and put it on a path to spiritual salvation. Color is painting's most pronounced aesthetic element because of its non-materiality and fluidity. It is also the element that least resembles writing and readily draws analogies to emotions. Damascene is aware of this, I believe. But color's prominence

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33 PG 94:1268 A–B. Maximus, *On the Cosmic Mystery*, p. 46. This passage is cited for its lyricism and love of icons in Cavarnos, *Guide*, p. 243. The description of paintings as "flowering" into vivid narratives equivalent to read-aloud books is found earlier in St. Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–c. 395): "The painter, too, has spread out the blooms of his art, having depicted on an image (*en eikoni*) the martyr's brave deeds, his resistance … all these he wrought by means of colors as if it were a book that uttered speech …" Mango, *The Art*, pp. 36–37, 39.

34 For a glossary of Byzantine color terms including *anthos* see, James, *Light and Colour*, pp. 73–77. On *chros* James cites Aristotle, *Metereologica*, III 4 375.

35 *Epistle to Hebrews*, PG63:130A, quoted in Liz James, "Colour and the Byzantine Rainbow," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 15 (1991): pp. 66–94.

36 John 21:8–14. Mesarites, "Description of the Church of the Holy Apostles."

37 James, "Colour and the Byzantine Rainbow." See also James, *Light and Colour*, pp. 83–84 where *pyrros*, flame or fire, is the term used to describe the radiance of a metallic halo on the image of Christ Antiphonetes, which speaks through the contrast of its pale and fiery hues.

is also the result of the apparitional and mirroring qualities assigned to images, a conduit for emotions as well as theophanies.

Images "make manifest" and "demonstrate" (*ekphantorike*, *deiktike*), writes John, the existence of "hidden" things (*kryphiou*).[38] These include the obscure (*pros amydran katanoesin*) poetic images encountered in Scripture, things and events in the Old Testament that prefigure holy persons (e.g., burning bush for the Virgin Mary), and episodes from the life of Christ that hint at his divine nature etc.[39] Biblical stories also use figures as didactic and mnemonic devices to outline virtues.[40] In all cases, whether it is a figure of speech or an actual picture, an image points beyond itself to a less tangible but more encompassing reality that has no other way of expression. Its imperfection is a sign of the perfect things that are hiding behind it; it is a veil through which divine things are dispensed or a mirror in which they vaguely take shape.

Thus, every image is a theophany but not in its own time and space. Representation keeps it tied to its holy originals and it is in that connection that it participates in the original's life. Tirelessly Damascene quotes his sources on this subject. From Cyril of Alexandria: "images are like archetypes; for it is necessary for them to be thus and otherwise."[41] And according to Gregory Nazianzen: "It is the very nature of the image to be a copy of the archetype and to be called after it."[42] And John Chrysostom: "For if the image of the invisible were itself invisible, then it would not be an image; for an image, because it is an image, should be taken by us as precisely similar to what it represents, just as the type of a likeness (*charaktera homoioseos*)."[43] Verisimilitude leads to veneration. It is the thread that connects material and spiritual realities and enables the mind to find its path to the immaterial through the material. Damascene quotes Dionysius "Truly visible things are manifest images of invisible things" and explains that images (*aesthetais eikosin*) in the world and in art are the expression of divine love because they draw the soul to the contemplation of divine and immaterial realities (*theian kai aylon theorian*).[44]

Images of angelic beings should reflect their intellectual nature and activity (*noetos pareinai kai energein*), the "bodily image disclosing (*delouses*) a certain incorporeal and intellectual vision (*asomaton kai noeten tina theorian*)."[45] To become an object of contemplation, a picture must participate in an act of signification that originates outside its own being. It must contain its object like a mirror contains the image that forms on its surface. As in the Areopagite cosmos, images are spectacles, never beings in their own right—masters, so to speak, of their own identity and life. They capture divine realities

38 PG94:1337BC, 1341A.

39 PG94:1341A–C.

40 PG94:1341CD–1344A.

41 PG94:1367C.

42 PG94:1360D.

43 Ibid.

44 PG94:1360ABC.

45 PG94:1344B. Angels were a favorite subject in Byzantine iconography (and iconology). Ladner, "The Concept of the Image."

the way they capture the world: always in semblance and by reflection—spontaneously. We can see this in the third treatise, when Damascene explains their nature (*ti esti eikon*): "it is a likeness (*omoioma*) and pattern (*paradeigma*) and impression (*ektypoma*) of something, showing in itself what is depicted (*en eauton deiknyon to eikonizomenon*)."[46] Pictures (like photographs) register the physical appearance of objects, nothing more.

The three different terms used here are intended to emphasize exactly this quality. A picture has no independent existence; it is always some thing's trace, imprint or reflection. It could even be a shadow and in this way look like a letter—the reverse happens sometimes with Buddhist and Islamic calligraphy (the letter is turned into a picture). It is shallow; it has no depth. Pictures do not have "the powers of the soul" (*psuchikas dynameis ouk exei*).[47] An image that "does not live nor does it think, or give utterance (*ptheggetai*), or feel, or move its members," cannot be mistaken for its original (e.g., Christ). But it can signify it (from a safe distance). In the same spirit, Mesarites describes figures in a mosaic as being "not among the living (*empsychois*) but among the soulless (*apsychois*) and painted things" and tries to bring them to life by putting them in words (*logo diagraphomena*).[48]

The only way that this letter-like image can be animated is by words or color. Color can of course be scripted (e.g., a combination of colors, like blue and gold or silver, used to denote the divine light), as Liz James has shown in her original study of rainbows in Byzantine iconography.[49] Shape, outline and color (*schemata*, *perigraphen*, *chroma*), the three qualities that define bodies according to Damascene, are the means of art as well as literature and rhetoric.[50] Since verbal descriptions and *ekphraseis* also use color, color is not exempt from rhetorical treatment.[51] Damascene actually does that, as we have seen, when he gives an emotional interpretation of red in the passage that we discussed earlier. The passage is actually a topos since it repeats a similar experience recorded by Asterios of Amaseia (d. c. 410).

After struggling over a difficult passage in Demosthenes, Asterios enters a church seeking peace and quiet—exactly like Damascene. The coincidence of classical scholarship, devotion and art is consistent with the author's rhetorical approach:

> Having spent a long time on this speech, I became congested in my mind and had need of recreation and a walk so as to relax the strain of my spirit. So I left my chamber and after a short stroll in the marketplace in the company of friends, I proceeded to God's temple to pray in peace and quiet. When I arrived there … I saw a painting that captivated me entirely—a work of art you might have

46 PG94:1337A. Maximus, *On the Cosmic Mystery*, p. 95.

47 PG94:1337B. This is obviously an attempt to counter the Iconoclasts' charge that pictures inadvertently end up as magical objects or as idols.

48 Mesarites, "Description of the Church of the Holy Apostles."

49 James, "Colour and the Byzantine Rainbow."

50 PG94:1344B.

51 James, *Light and Colour*, pp. 125–126.

> ascribed to Ephranor [fourth century B.C.] or another one of the ancients who raised painting to such great heights by making pictures that were all but alive. So, if you please—and indeed we have time for a story—I shall describe the painting to you. For we, men of letters, can use colors no worse than painters do.[52]

Asterios then describes the icon conceding at some point: "for art, when it so wishes, can convey the semblance of wrath even by means of inanimate matter."[53]

Here, there is little attention to aesthetic qualities. Instead, the main focus is on the action that is depicted and the character (especially that of the Virgin) of the figures involved in it. Asterios, however, has three aesthetic moments. The first is when he praises the artist for "having blended so well the bloom of his colors" to show contradictory affections (e.g., modesty and virtue). In the second, he describes how different shades of red were used in the painting of a martyrdom scene. It is obvious that Damascene borrowed from Asterios: "… the painter has kindled a great fire and he has given substance to the flame by high-lighting on this side and that with red color."[54] The third instance is less conspicuous but it occurs when Asterios completes his description by returning to a comparison between writer and painter: "At this point the painter stayed his hand and I shall stay my speech."[55] He then asks the reader to compare his description to the actual painting to see "how far I have fallen short of it in my account."[56] Even though rhetoric dominates, the painting is given some authority as to its content and, based on his earlier statement, most likely also its form.

We cannot entirely dismiss aesthetic considerations in this and similar texts. The use of a topos appears formal and void of personal relevance or fresh observation but this is not always the case. Experiences that are both significant and formative in cultural perception can still be conveyed using stylized forms.[57] St. Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–c. 395), for example, uses the verb *perianthizo* to refer to the application of colors that together constitute the form of an object.[58] Color and shape give splendor to form: "the divine beauty is not made resplendent (*enaglaizetai*) in a certain external figure (*schemati*) of fortunate shape (*morphes*) through certain beautiful colors (*euchroias*) …."[59] Color defines the human face. It literally "transfers" (*metaferetai*) its shape and expression (*morphe*) from life to art (to the panel, *pinaki*). The face settles on a panel like it settles on a glass surface. Color both mediates and ensures (finalizes) resemblance.[60]

52 Mango, *The Art*, pp. 37–38.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid., p. 39.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 James, *Light and Colour*, p. 131.
58 *De Hominis Opificio*, PG 44:137A; also in Ladner, "The Concept of the Image in the Greek Fathers," and James, *Light and Colour*, pp. 135–136.
59 PG94:1269A; Maximus, *On the Cosmic Mystery*, p. 47.
60 PG94:1269B. Ibid.

In a speech commemorating St. Theodore, Gregory praises the iconography of a church dedicated to the martyr Saint, using the color-as-speech formula. The painter "wrought by means of colors" scenes of martyrdom and Christ in his "human form" "as if it were a book that uttered speech."[61] And he concludes: "for painting, even if it is silent, is capable of speaking from the wall, and being of the greatest benefit."[62] The emphasis is on rhetoric and painting is typically didactic. But on the reverse side of this analogy is the notion that under certain conditions images can communicate meaning directly, as if they were speaking or coming alive.[63] This is an aesthetic observation tucked behind a rhetorical topos like a two-sided icon.

In a different text (*De Fide Orthodoxa*), Damascene describes color as the primary object of sight and a conduit for all other aspects of aesthetic perception. A body is perceived to the extent that it is "colored" or by virtue of its color: "sight first perceives color and it is through and in color that it recognizes (*syndiaginoskei … to chromati*) a colorful (*kechrosmenon*) body, its size and shape, the place where it exists, the space in between, and the number."[64] Color does not only dominate perception, psychologically. It also dominates form and the composition of an image, whether in art or in actual experience. This is an example of aesthetic sophistication that is absent from the *Defense*.

In the *Defense*, by contrast, the icon is part of a sequence of representational acts in creation that reflect the mystical life of the Trinity. It is through these acts, as through a chain, that it remains actively connected to its divine or holy archetypes. Theophany is gradual rather than spontaneous. The painting hosts the divine likeness but it does not incorporate it. It cannot present its own instance or moment of theophany (qua image) because it does not have the integral being and interior space needed for self-disclosure. Conceived almost as a pictograph, it is experienced as a type of script in need of a reading act—its sole chance for animation. Damascene knows that color is essential for modeling and that under certain conditions it can convey vitality, fluidity and emotion. But he is only interested in analogies between spiritual fervor and redness. He does not acknowledge the role of size, shape, texture or line in a composition and his view of painting is shallow and simplistic. Even though he singles out color as the most expressive component of a painting, he treats it more like a pigment than an aesthetic quality.

It is important to put these observations in their proper context. Damascene was neither an aesthetician nor a painter. As a theologian, he had an urgent project to complete. Considering the ferocity of the Iconoclastic reaction,

61 Mango, *The Art*, pp. 36–37.

62 Ibid., p. 37.

63 The use of optical devices to bring images closer to the viewer is discussed in the next chapter. Mathew, *Byzantine Aesthetics*, pp. 29–33.

64 *De Fide Orthodoxa*, II, 18, PG94:933D–936A. James, *Light and Colour*, p. 135. The translation is mine.

it was necessary to tie religious images unequivocally to a transcendent original. It was also important to remove from them any kind of inner animation and thus put an end once and for all to their association with magic and idolatry. His fascination with color should be read in this context as suggestive of a discarnate quality in things. By reducing the image to its essential plastic elements, one could make it appear as the transient reflection of the divine presence, an apparitional reality not easily circumscribed.

The *Defense* established the theological significance of images and legitimized their place in Church liturgy and life. But its iconology is more about theology than it is about art. Ironically, it is in Maximus, who never wrote about images, that we find a compelling ontological foundation for an Orthodox aesthetics. To tie his ontology to Byzantine perceptions of art, we will examine a small number of *ekphraseis* and epigrams in which classical ideals about painting assumed their Byzantine, Christian form.

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The Living Image in Byzantine Experience

Byzantine aesthetics and art criticism did not produce any classical theoretical texts comparable to works that we find in other traditions. In the fifth century, for example, Liu Hsieh (c. 465–522) wrote *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, a critical examination of literary theories with significant implications for aesthetic perception.[1] These and other treatises show an interest in literary and artistic theory in China that is absent from Byzantine sources. Outside the domain of theology, Byzantine writing about religious art was confined to *ekphraseis*. We have no indication that the authors of these texts were interested in inconsistencies between the nature and judgment of a work of art or in the application of critical standards. On this basis, it has been argued that the Byzantines were unsophisticated consumers of religious art who easily attributed life-like qualities to images with an obvious lack of naturalism.[2]

This may have been true of the uneducated viewer in Byzantium, as it is true of the uneducated or ideological viewer today who feels entitled to see in the work of art whatever she imagines or desires. Conventions or cultural standards that allow religion, the state or subjectivity to direct perception are an inimical part of the aesthetic experience, whatever form that might take. The Byzantines were not any different in that regard. But to see art through conventions is not necessarily an unreasonable or uncritical act. What appears abstract from a naturalistic standpoint is realistic by the standards of an iconography that seeks a particular kind of transcendent simplicity in form and composition. Icons were meant to recreate a spiritual realm, to paint a world in which temporal beings live eschatological lives. The objective was to impart on matter a spiritual quality and eliminate the physical and sculpted sense of flesh that painting can achieve under certain conditions (e.g., in oil painting with the blending of pigments).

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1 Liu Hsieh, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, trans. Vincent Yu-chung Shih (Taipei, 1957). Henry Maguire, "Originality in Byzantine Art Criticism," in A.R. Littlewood (ed.), *Originality in Byzantine Literature, Art and Music: A Collection of Essays* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 101–114.

2 Mango, *The Art*, pp. xiv–xv.

To this day, volume in Byzantine icons is created by the layering over an opaque surface of thin washes of paint. Colors become progressively lighter so that in the end, as one contemporary iconographer put it, the "flesh shines from below."[3] Painted in this manner or outlined with a few brushstrokes and highlights, as we can see in the unique iconography of Theophanes the Greek, a face or figure combines expressive power with a subtle physicality to suggest the ethereal and majestic presence of holy beings. Not all icons achieve this quality but some do in an exemplary way.

The challenge for painting that looks at the world through a religious prism is to convey the transcendent realities that are essential to its vision. Volume, depth, texture, color, composition and illumination can be used to reconfigure the forms and relationships that we ordinarily associate with things and persons. Far from being incompatible with naturalism, abstraction can bring landscapes, animals and humans to a state of vibrant existence and unitive presence. This approach to composition has a parallel in other traditions, as we shall see below. Chinese ink paintings in the Sung period combined abstraction with a distinctive type of naturalism that reflected Taoist and Buddhist ideas of reality.[4] By placing objects only in a small part of the overall composition, and making space its dominant and enveloping reality, painting could suggest the transcendent union of emptiness and form.[5]

When we consider continuity and originality in the Byzantine response to the living image, we should be careful not to exaggerate their difference. Anthony Kardellis has argued convincingly that an uninterrupted "classical inheritance provided the vehicle and the inspiration for the moral, aesthetic, and literary expansion of Byzantine literature."[6] Novels, in particular, showed a "playful reflexivity" in their rhetoric and adaptation of classical topoi and concepts.[7] The creative and idiosyncratic manner in which Maximus enriched his tradition shows the same movement in theology. The Byzantines, as Andrew Louth put it, were especially good in creating an "impression of permanence."[8]

To gain legitimacy within a certain paradigm was essential, but it did not necessarily translate into imitation. As James Cahill has argued in the case of Chinese art, we should be careful not to approach Byzantine art as nothing

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[3] Statement by the iconographer Stathis Trahanatzis communicated to the author on December 29, 2010.

[4] Jerome Silbergeld, *Chinese Painting Style: Media, Methods, and Principles of Form* (Seattle, 1982), pp. 38–40, 48–49.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Anthony Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 252, 262–263.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Louth, *Maximus*, p. 19. By contrast, Mango sees Byzantine literature as "static, locked within the bounds of its inherited conventions," a notion also applied, unfairly, to the icon. Cyril Mango, "Byzantine Literature as a Distorting Mirror," in Cyril Mango (ed.), *Byzantium and Its Image: History and Culture of the Byzantine Empires and Its Heritage* (London, 1984), pp. 3–18. A review of how stereotypes about Byzantine art developed in the aftermath of the 1453 conquest in Mathew, *Byzantine Aesthetics*, pp. 7–11.

more than an improvisation on established themes and interpret it on that basis as performance or a form of visual rhetoric.[9] The recognizable patterns generated in Byzantine art, literature and theology worked like a grammar. Rather than exclude creative and original expression, they set the parameters within which it could resonate with collective experience. Archaism was often a pretext and a framework for introducing new ideas or forms. In Byzantine art, wrote Kitzinger, "ancient formulae are carried along in fossilized form but have an uncanny way of becoming revivified and of being filled with emotional content."[10]

Constantly re-interpreted and infused with new sensibilities, the archaic became in that sense the ground of creative interaction and continuity rather than repetition: "Byzantium never really ceased to respond to the life force that animates all Greek art and that had found its most varied and emphatic expressions during the Hellenistic period."[11] This is also the view of no less an authority on Byzantine art than Manolis Chatzidakis: "Sometimes they [Byzantine painters] were scrupulous imitators, but more often they took liberties which permitted them to express, more or less, the taste of their own period while preserving the traditional iconographical features of the model."[12] Far from being a stultifying force that enveloped the work of art from the outside like a rigid formula, permanence was understood dynamically and we might say organically, as the flourishing in recognizable patterns of vital form. The same dynamic is evident in the history of Chinese and Japanese art, as we shall see in our concluding chapter.

The view of the Christian image as a locus of encounter with holy persons and realities, and an affirmation of their continuing presence in the life of the faithful, is standard in most *ekphraseis* and epigrams. As we have seen, the creation of vivid verbal imagery was the defining feature of the genre from the time of Quintilian (c. 35–c. 100) who argued that the graphic description of facts could rival if not surpass their actual experience.[13] This idea has parallels in the Byzantine perception of the icon as a physical object tied to a transcendent original with miraculous powers. Exaggeration of a painting's aesthetic qualities for spiritual reasons was always a risk and it happened frequently. To that end, Byzantine authors were quite capable of paraphrasing and copying classical topoi that gave them a facile formula for laudation.[14]

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[9] Richard M. Barnhart, *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting* (New Haven, 1997), p. 6.

[10] Ernst Kitzinger, "The Hellenistic Heritage in Byzantine Art," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17 (1963), pp. 95–115, 110.

[11] Ibid., pp. 114–115.

[12] Chatzidakis, "An Encaustic Icon of Christ at Sinai," pp. 203–204.

[13] According to the Acts of the 787 Council, the faithful should "look not at what is seen but at what is signified in it." For Quintilian an *ekphrasis* has maximum effect when "the facts … are displayed in their living truth to the eyes of the mind." See James and Webb, "To Understand Ultimate Things." Sahas, p. 98. Kazhdan and Maguire, "Byzantine Hagiographical Texts."

[14] Mango, "Byzantine Literature as a Distorting Mirror." Cyril Mango, "Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder," in Mango, *Byzantium and Its Image*, pp. 55–75.

But they were also capable of using these topoi creatively to communicate what they saw and admired in icons and mosaics. In such instances, aesthetic qualities were assigned a spiritual significance of their own and the topos was not so much a rhetorical device as it was a verbal means of recording an extraordinary experience—as we shall suggest later, a kind of photograph. Thus, to fully appreciate Byzantine aesthetic experience, we must always keep in mind this tension between rhetoric and reality, between a theologically imposed spirituality and a spirituality that is inherent in the art object.

Nowhere perhaps is this tension more evident than in two archetypal versions, one Christian, one pagan, of the same story, a topos about the spiritual poverty of art which at the same time recognizes its extraordinary power over the human memory and imagination. We read in the second-century apocryphal *Acts of John* about a talented (*euphues*) painter who was commissioned by John's disciple Lycomedes to secretly paint a portrait of the Apostle from life, for veneration in a private altar.[15] The portrait was apparently the highest form of gratitude Lycomedes and his wife could show to John for bringing them back to life! It was executed in two days, suggesting the artist's virtuosity and perhaps the impressionistic quality of the image. On the first day, an outline was drawn (*skiagraphesas*). On the second, colors were added (*chromasin katakerasen*), the portrait was finished and was immediately placed on an altar.

The Apostle who has difficulty recognizing his face (*toioutos eimi morphen?*) until he sees it in a mirror (*katoptron*), reprimands Lycomedes for venerating an idol. He dismisses the painting as being only a reflection or semblance of his carnal self (*to sarkiko mou eidolo*). This image resembles me (*omoia me*), he explains, but "it is not like me" (*ouk emoi the*).[16] The resurrection miracle provides a context for juxtaposing the life-giving power of faith and prayer with the lifelessness and artificiality of art. The contrast is underscored when John tells Lycomedes to forget about his physical appearance and instead paint a picture based on his words and on the palette (*chromata*) of virtues that Jesus painted on the human soul (*zographon … eikonographon Iesous*).[17] The art of preaching and restoring souls replaces painting. Like Jesus, the timeless artist, John uses words to turn his listeners (*didosi di'emou*) into ideal paintings—images of God.[18] But Lycomedes holds on to the portrait:

> And Lycomedes remained with the blessed man, united in faith and in the knowledge of our God; but rejoiced still more that he was to have him in a portrait (*pleion the egalliasato hoti en eikoni emelle auton echei*).[19]

The Apostle's final objection that the painted image is only a "dead picture of what is dead (*nekrou nekran eikona*)," does not dissuade his disciple. The

[15] J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 313–314.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Greek text in Eric Junod and Jean-Daniel Kaestli (eds.), *Acta Iohannis (Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum)* (17 vols, Turnhout, 1983), vol. 1, pp. 26–29.

[19] Elliott, pp. 313–314.

story gives us a good sense of the power exercised by paintings as memorials and substitutes for living persons on the contemporary imagination. From a spiritual standpoint, art seems useless to those who have died to the world and are seeking a different form of life. The portrait may be a credible recreation of the physical man in John but based on his reaction, it shows nothing of the spiritual man that he has become. The appearance is accurate; the person behind (or in) it is not. Still, the ambiguity remains. John does not reject Lycomedes' explanation that the painting helps keep his presence and teachings constantly before him. He calls his disciple's eagerness for art "childish and imperfect" (*paidiodes kai ateles*)—by no means a total condemnation of painting. His strongest remark is that poor Lycomedes has something dead in his hand which he thinks is alive. But for Lycomedes, the icon is a powerful substitute for the real man.

The story reappears in the next century in Porphyry's biography of Plotinus. Once again painting's ability to register the living form of its subject (an equally charismatic personality) is first emphasized and then rejected on the grounds that the image fails to capture the essence or truth of its subject.[20] The painter (Carterius) who is commissioned to paint Plotinus' portrait is one of the best (*aristos*) and easily retains accurate mental impressions (*ek tou oran fantasias*) of his subject. These eventually enable him to draw a masterful (*eufuia*) portrait (*eikona*) from memory (*eikasma*) with some help from his friend Amelius who knows the philosopher well. Like John, the sage dismisses the work as "a likeness of a likeness" (*eidolou eidolon*).[21] When he dies, the picture will remain behind to speak falsely of him in years to come (*polychronioteron*). How, we are not sure, but the implication is that the portrait says something about the man that he cannot change. If true, then art has a voice of its own and the image is rejected for this reason: because Plotinus cannot make it speak as he wants to (both now and in the future).

The speaking image that has a life of its own is a recurrent theme in Byzantine aesthetic experience. An ancient epigram that praises a statue of Zeus by the sculptor Phidias is used as a model by Nicephorus Callistus to praise an icon of Christ:

> Either God came from heaven to earth to show you his image, Phidias, or you went to see God.
>
> Either Christ Himself came down from heaven and showed the exact traits of His face to him who has such eloquent hands (*eulalon*), or else the famous Eulalius mounted up to the very skies to paint with his skilled hand Christ's exact appearance.[22]

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20 Porphyry, "On the Life of Plotinus and the Order of His Books," in Plotinus, *Enneads*, pp. 3–4. More striking is John's equation of colors with virtues and his reference to Christ as a "painter" (*zographos*), which recalls Plotinus' famous passage about sculpting the virtuous soul, *Enneads* I.6.9.

21 Ibid.

22 Mango, *The Art*, pp. 231–232. Mango, "Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder." *The Greek Anthology Books XIII–XVI*, trans. W.R. Paton (Cambridge, 2005), Book xvi, epigram 81.

Except for the persons involved, the texts are nearly identical. But here is one little difference. It is the term "*eulalon*" which puns on the name of the painter that Nicephorus extols. It suggests an idea that is absent from the ancient text. The painter's hands are eloquent because they paint eloquent pictures. The icon's exact resemblance to Christ includes its liveliness. This is what makes the work stand out and seem heavenly. In another epigram composed by Callistus about a different work by Eulalius, the discussion of aesthetic qualities goes a step further to include color and its impact on form (see below).

We know that the Byzantines could be very careful observers of art. Henry Maguire has shown that a significant number of *ekphraseis* were written on the basis of "spontaneous observation," with attention to the salient features of the mosaics and icons they described.[23] Thus, developments in the world of art, as for instance the depiction of the crucified Christ in post-Iconoclastic iconography in a wounded, curved posture, were often reflected in contemporary *ekphraseis*.[24] To emphasize the attention given to accuracy in this and other contexts, Maguire cites one instance in Mesarites' description of the Church of the Holy Apostles, where the author's account of the Miraculous Draught of Fish follows the order of its iconographic depiction rather than that of the Gospel story.[25] He also notes the fidelity of certain descriptions to the use of illusionistic devices in Byzantine painting and their attention to details of expression and gesture in the depicted subjects.[26]

An epigram by the fifth-century author Neilus Scholasticus calls the depiction in sensuous form of the incorporeal Archangel "daring," and reminds the reader that despite its sensuous nature (*morphose ton asomaton*), the painting (*eikon*) actually elevates (*anagei*) the viewer's mind to the recollection (*noerin mnestin*) of discarnate realities.[27] There is an implicit distinction here between the painted (physical) object and the aesthetic object that impresses us with its psychological astuteness. The image of the angel is lifted out of its physical frame or outline. The mental impression immediately recalls its archetype and triggers an ascent from the sensuous to the spiritual, from the physical to the intellective. The form given to the angel (as painting requires) immediately suggests his incorporeality. A better known epigram by the anthologist and author of epigrams Agathias Scholasticus (531–580) that will

23 Maguire, "Truth and Convention in Byzantine Descriptions."

24 Ibid. According to Maguire, in his description of the Incredulity of Thomas, Mesarites "shows an appreciation of one of the most important innovations of Middle Byzantine art, the portrayal of Christ suffering on the cross as a man." Thus "*ekphraseis* were not entirely the product of a dead literary tradition; they can also be shown to reflect contemporary changes and developments in the visual arts." Maguire concludes elsewhere that for iconodules "the work of art has no life of its own right." Kazhdan and Maguire, "Byzantine Hagiographical Texts."

25 Maguire, "Truth and Convention in Byzantine Descriptions."

26 Ibid.

27 *The Greek Anthology Books I–VI*, trans. W.R. Paton (15 vols, Cambridge, 1999), vol. 1, p. 21 (33).

be discussed in detail later, gives the same reason for praising an encaustic icon of the Archangel Michael. Its powerful presence is said to energize vision, imprint the image (*en eauto ton tupon eggrapsas*) deep in the viewer's mind (*vathu noon*) and lift it to a state of prayer and contemplation.[28]

In both examples, the transition from image to archetype is instantaneous, as if both occupy the same place. To see something in art is to see it as a living reality. In Agathias' epigram, the viewer "trembles (*tremei*)" as if in the painted figure he encounters the angelic being in person.[29] This is not mere rhetoric. The image does not represent its object; it realizes it. Theodore the Studite described an icon of St. Demetrius in a baptism as a type of *logos* that played the role of the infant's godfather.[30] A testament to an icon's power of presence, this view reflects the legacy of Greek portraiture that reached exceptional levels of vivid form, as we saw in the Fayum panels.[31] When Gregory of Nyssa described a portrait as "speaking from the wall," he was not exaggerating.[32]

According to Ernst Kitzinger, Byzantine interest in the insubstantiality of physical forms can be traced to Hellenistic painting: "Glowing colors and shimmering lights not only give shape and heightened life to figures and objects, but often also dissolve them and make them transparent."[33] The Byzantines eagerly embraced Hellenistic illusionism: "In all centuries, from the fourth to the fifteenth one finds innumerable instances in which highlights and shades help to convey an impression of physical presence, of movement, and sometimes of inner life as well."[34] Artists infused form and space with an ambient luminosity and tried to bring things and persons to a state of living presence, consistent with the transcendent realities of the Christian cosmos.

The restrained lyricism of Byzantine portraiture may resemble Greek art of the fourth century B.C., but it does not copy it. The relationship is far more dynamic and creative. This is why Kitzinger is reluctant to speak of Hellenistic influence and prefers instead to use terms like "affinity" that more accurately explain the "autonomy of Byzantine emotional expression."[35] Byzantine illusionism was not "a convenient idiom" or "a mechanically repeated technique"; it was "a new aesthetic value," "a positive aesthetic element deeply tied to the new spiritual values and content."[36] Gold highlights, not seen in Christian painting before the fourth century, and inseparable from the

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28 Ibid., pp. 21–22 (34).

29 Ibid.

30 Mango, *The Art*, pp. 174–175. *Epistles I*, PG 99:961.

31 Doxiadis, *The Mysterious Fayum*, pp. 91–93. Chatzidakis, "An Encaustic Icon of Christ at Sinai," pp. 197–208.

32 For a discussion of presence and potency in the portable icon from an anthropological perspective, see Annemarie Weyl Carr, "Originality in the Icon: The Panel Painted Icon," in Littlewood, pp. 115–124.

33 Kitzinger, "The Hellenistic Heritage in Byzantine Art," pp. 95–115.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

Byzantine panel and mosaic painting ever since, gave form to the experience of material and spiritual illumination.[37] A sophisticated understanding of color, light and spatial composition underlined the construction and placement of mosaics and frescos.[38] Combined with the Hellenistic emphasis on facial expression, pose and gesture, it brought to the human figure the aura of eloquent holiness so essential to the Christian conception of human existence.

Thus topoi and clichés in Byzantine literature about art should be understood dynamically in terms of cultural continuities rather than imitation. Given the fluid relationship between painting and the written word, written descriptions should not be seen exclusively as rhetorical exercises or as attempts to impose on images theological ideas. In fact, *ekphraseis* and epigrams become more interesting when considered as verbal analogs of paintings, mosaics and statuary and shorthand for the aesthetic qualities they contained—a kind of photography in words. Some were more accurate than others. Some were especially precise in their use of artistic analogies and metaphors and their ability to formulate aesthetic ideas. Others were as impressionistic as the works they set out to describe. In some instances, this impressionism had an actual aesthetic basis; in many, it was rhetorical.

In their best examples, they were building on a certain pattern in aesthetic perception that was compatible with the experience of transcendent realities. This pattern, as we shall see in the next chapter, had been established in Greek antiquity and persisted through the gradual transition to a Christian aesthetic. It explains why one could praise a statue of Zeus in the same terms that one would praise an icon of Christ.[39] In both pagan and Christian art, the viewer either saw or imagined (that he saw) an aesthetic ideal that he knew by heart: the aura of the image that was capable of *enargeia*. This was the painting that could establish not so much its veracity *vis-à-vis* an original, but rather an aesthetic form of life, a *sui generis* reality—as we saw in the case of Eutyches. In some cases, theologians tried to impart this aesthetic form on their writing by creating concise analogies between theological ideas and the act of painting—becoming in that process painters themselves and casting their work as a visual object or phenomenon in its own right.

It was because Christian images aspired to this ideal and some actually achieved it that Byzantine accounts of art can often sound so repetitive and formulaic. The experience of these ideal works was powerful and their qualities gradually became the standard for the perception and judgment of all religious art, irrespective of achievement. The recollection of classical and Hellenistic antiquity informs Byzantine writing about art, nature and life and frames its approach to the aesthetic object and to aesthetic experience

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37 Ibid.

38 Mathew, *Byzantine Aesthetics*, pp. 22–37.

39 Similarities between classical and Byzantine topoi and their types are discussed in detail in Maguire, "Truth and Convention in Byzantine Descriptions." For an attempt to define realism in terms of a viewer response that adopts Mango's view of *ekphraseis*, see James and Webb, "To Understand Ultimate Things."

more generally. When not praising icons or churches, Byzantine churchmen and scholars turned to the artistic and literary legacy of antiquity in order to immortalize youth, celebrate physical and moral beauty, or extol the power of the written word and the enduring splendor of art.

St. Gregory the Theologian (c. 329–c. 390) made frequent references to Tantalus, Phthonus, Sisyphus, Eros and the Muses, and showed his mastery of Greek mythology by recalling tales of metamorphoses and drawing analogies between athletic and martyrial feats.[40] He composed poetry on Christ's Resurrection using the idiom and forms of classical literature, while some of his homilies contain allusions to pagan gods and mythology.[41] Agathias, whom we met earlier, described an encaustic painting that showed a Satyr thoroughly absorbed in playing his pipe but lively enough to turn to the viewer and smile (*gelon sigesen*).[42]

Writing in classical meter, the monk, humanist and hymnographer John Mavropous (fl. c. 1050) supplicated Christ to spare Plato and Plutarch in the final judgment, because the two sages had embraced virtue. The court poet and author, Theodorus Prodromus (c. 1100–1158), borrowed expressions from Homer, Hesiod and Aeschylus, among others, while during his time it became fashionable to quote Sapphic verse (more on Theodorus later).[43] The Metropolitan of Athens, Michael Acominatus (c. 1140–1220), confessed his "artless and lovesick" nostalgia for antiquity and sought to recapture in verse the boisterous splendor of ancient Athens—a city where words once had great power—by "setting up an image of it in writing (*indalma graphikon*)."[44] In the thirteenth century, the Emperor Theodore II Lascaris visited the ruins of Pergamon in Asia Minor. He expressed his admiration for the city's Hellenic past and lamented the poverty of its inhabitants, noting that "the works of the dead are more beautiful than those of the living."[45]

In these and other examples, educated Byzantines freely invoked antiquity to justify their aesthetic judgments. But painting divine and holy persons was a different matter. There the aura of the image as an integral reality capable of a transcendent life existed side by side with its denigration for lifelessness and superficiality. Sometimes the one took over, sometimes the other. It was as if Platonism was being weighed against an alternative view of the image for

[40] See, for example, epigrams 85b, 90, 91, 97, 104, 110, 121, 124, 126–129 in *The Greek Anthology Books VII–VIII*, trans. W.R. Paton, ed. G.P. Goold (15 vols, Cambridge, 2000), vol. 2, pp. 437–457. A resurgence of Greek letters in tenth-century Byzantium led to a number of collections of epigrams, among them that of Constantine Kephalas. O. Hatzopoulos (ed.), *Hellenike Anthologia* (Athens: Kaktos, 2003), vol. 7, pp. 9–44.

[41] Christos Simelidis, "Honouring the Bridegroom like God, Carm.Hist.6.46," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, 46 (2006): pp. 87–100. J.M. Hussey, *Ascetics and Humanists in Eleventh-Century Byzantium* (London, 1960), p. 11.

[42] Epigram 244 in *The Greek Anthology Book XIII–XVI*, trans. W. R. Paton, ed. G.P. Goold (15 vols, Cambridge, 2005), vol. 5, pp. 305–306.

[43] Simelidis, "Honouring the Bridegroom."

[44] "I suffer artlessly what lovers suffer (*erotolepton atechnos pascho pathos*)" Trypanis, pp. 441, 445–446. Hussey, pp. 15–17.

[45] Mango, "Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder."

which theology and culture did not yet have a language. In the next epigram, an anonymous wonders about a picture of Odysseus. The topos pits word against picture. The painting seems to have a similar fate to that of persecuted icons that are washed off miraculously on sea shores:

> Ever is the sea unkind to the son of Laertes; the flood has bathed the picture (*eikona*) and washed off the figure (*typon*) from the wood. What did it gain thereby? For in Homer's verse the image (*eikon*) of him is painted on immortal pages.[46]

In reality, written records are as vulnerable to the elements of nature as are paintings. Despite the simplistic comparison, Odysseus' two portraits seem equally vivid and their existence in time suggests the timeless trajectory of poetry and art. Poetry's immateriality may be something that art lacks but then again the memory of an image can linger as long as a verbal description and maybe even longer—which is why one would draw the comparison. When poetry is intensely visual, the fusion of word and image leaves a lasting impression. But the same can happen with a painting that brings its subject to life and speech. Both exist in memory from where they may perish or survive.

This is also the theme of an epigram by Agathias. It acknowledges the great pleasure of owning and experiencing works of art in this life, but, like the topoi that we examined earlier, objects to investing them with any kind of permanence, a quality that he ascribes only to virtue, wisdom and the written word:

> Columns and pictures (*graphides*) and inscribed tablets are a source of great delight to those who possess them, but only during their life; for the empty glory (*kena kydea photon*) of man does not much benefit the spirits of the dead. But virtue and the grace of wisdom both accompany us there and survive here attracting memory. So neither Plato nor Homer takes pride in pictures (*chromasin*) or monuments, but in wisdom alone. Blessed are they whose memory is enshrined in wise volumes and not in empty images (*keneas eikonas*).[47]

Wise words last longer and are of more benefit than the monuments made to those who spoke them. A text speaks of its author in ways that a painted portrait cannot.

By contrast, a tenth-century epigram by Constantine Rhodius recognizes the ability of art to convey transcendent realities in its own terms:

> If one would paint (*zographein*) thee, O Virgin, he had need of stars rather than of colors (*chromaton*), that thou, as the Gate of light (*photos*), mightst be painted in luminaries (*fostersin*). But the stars yield not to the voice (*logois*) of mortals. Therefore thou art delineated and painted by us with the material that nature and the laws of painting afford (*phusis kai graphes nomos*).[48]

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46 Epigram 125 in *The Greek Anthology*, vol. 5, p. 231.
47 Epigram 125 in *The Greek Anthology*, vol. 1, p. 125.
48 Epigram 17 in *The Greek Anthology*, vol. 5, pp. 121–122.

Here colors are the equivalent in nature of stars. The Virgin's portrait deserves to be represented by nature's most glorious and luminous pigments. Painting transcribes the voices (*logoi*) of those who praise her and through its use of colour conveys her luminosity and majesty, thus mirroring the heavens which reflect her glory. The text's tacit analogies are fertile ground for theological and aesthetic reflection. They provide insights into the nature of art and the demands placed on it by its holy subjects, while suggesting a mystical quality in both. Like stars, the laws of nature and art and those of human expression are perfectly aligned. The icon that captures the Virgin's stellar holiness will be a work of nature, art and divine grace—a miracle in its own right. The epigram's voice addresses her as if she is already painted. The mere sight of her image prompts it to utter these words in her presence.

Less intricate but clearly focused on the art object and its aesthetic and contemplative aspects is the following excerpt from a seventh-century manuscript. It describes a ciborium in the basilica of St. Demetrius in Thessaloniki, Greece, in which the Saint's icon and sarcophagus were first housed.[49] Like many descriptions of churches, paintings, mosaics and liturgical objects often produced by Byzantine piety, it appears first in a dream. The almost photographic clarity of the description underscores the dreamer's devotion and reverence for the Saint and for the holy nature of the object itself. The ciborium impresses its form on the dreamer's mind in the same way that it will later create a real visual impression.

> … it is hexagonal in plan, having six columns and as many partitions, shaped out of carved, assayed silver. Its roof is likewise held up all round by the six sides and terminates in a circular conjunction from the base up. At the top it bears a silver sphere of no small size, its lower part surrounded by shoots of lilies. At the very summit flashes forth the trophy that is victorious over death: by its silver composition it amazes our corporeal eyes, while by bringing Christ to mind, it illuminates with grace the eyes of the intellect—I mean the life-giving and venerable cross of God our Savior.[50]

The description continues with the ciborium's interior which is seen in the actual church, after the dream prompts an onsite visit. Dream and reality are fully (and miraculously) aligned, with an implicit recognition of the visual intensity experienced in dreams and in real life in the context of devotion. The intricate floral design in precious silver is especially admired for its delicate form and splendor. At the very top, the gleaming silver cross illuminates the viewer's mind with thoughts of Christ, suggesting a perfect alignment between aesthetic experience and contemplation, art and spiritual life. Its exquisite quality keeps the object in sight. As long as the silver shines and the lilies move, the intellect contemplates the divine presence in thought and form. The two co-exist and coincide. Dream, reality and the ciborium's written

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49 The base of the ciborium was discovered in the basilica in 1917. Part of the structure can be seen in the church today. Mango, *The Art*, p. 129.

50 The account is recorded in *Miracula S. Demetrii*. Ibid., p. 129. PG116:1265.

description paint the same picture. Keeping the holy object intact in one's intellect, memory and sight is an act of reverence. Built as an expression of reverence for the Saint, the structure translates and perpetuates his presence through time.

This recalls the concept of "*eusebeia*," used by Maximus to describe the ascetic's reverent vision of creation.[51] In fact, the term appears in a number of epigrams but has none of the qualities that Maximus assigns to it. In the three examples that we consider next, reverent perception centers on discerning and emulating the work's spiritual meaning. Aesthetic qualities are not explicitly mentioned but the experience of images in such terms presupposes aesthetic attention.

Mathew notices the term in an enigmatic epigram in the *Palatine Anthology*, dedicated to "Moses and the pharaoh's daughter." It reads: "An Egyptian woman, a hidden infant and nearby the water; these symbolize the *Logos* only for those who are reverent (*eusebeis*)."[52] The reverent viewer is an apt reader of the painting's typological meaning which is here encrypted in the simple picture of a woman covering a child next to a river. This is a good example of the treatment of pictures as pictographs that we saw in Damascene. The actual image stands for a type (Moses) which stands for another type (Christ).

In an epigram by Gregory Nazianzen the term takes a more aesthetic meaning. Gregory describes a painting or mosaic of the four virtues (justice, courage, continence and prudence) in the church of St. Basil in Caesarea. "As you look on the image (*eikon*) of the four life-giving virtues, stir your mind (*leusson seue noon*), to willing toil (*mochtho*); for the labor (*idrotes*) of piety (*eusebeias*) can draw us to a life that knows not old age."[53] The reader is told to concentrate on the content of the picture and internalize the spiritual qualities associated with the four figures. *Eusebeia* is the act of seeing and reading the image for its spiritual significance. Gazing at the picture is a type of ascetic act. As one's eyes move from figure to figure, the mind must follow, charting a parallel spiritual path.

Another epigram celebrates the restoration of a mosaic of Christ situated over the imperial throne in the opulent palace room known as "*Chrysotriklinos*" (destroyed during the Iconoclastic controversies).[54]

> The light of Truth hath shone forth again, and blunts the eyes of the false teacher. Piety (*eusebeia*) has increased and Error (*plane*) fallen. Faith flourishes and Grace grows. For behold, Christ pictured again shines (*eikonismenos lampei*) above the imperial throne and overthrows the dark heresies. And above the entrance, like a holy door (*theia pule*), is imaged (*steilographeitai*) the guardian Virgin.

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[51] PG 90:1088BC.

[52] Epigrams 31, 59 in *The Greek Anthology*, vol. 1, pp. 20–21, 30–31. Mathew, *Byzantine Aesthetics*, p. 79.

[53] Epigram 93 in *The Greek Anthology*, vol. 1, pp. 40–41.

[54] Ibid., epigrams 106, 107. Epigram 107 refers to Michael III (842–867) who restored the mosaic. The Chrysotriklinos was also known as "*Christotriklinos*" on account of the mosaic. Hatzopoulos, pp. 187–188.

The image exudes piety and splendor. It is not clear if this is the result of its own qualities or simply a reflection of the pious acts that have reinstated images in Church and public life. Like a mirror, it reflects the truths of Orthodoxy which is why it is honored and celebrated. While it seems to disappear in the light of the truth that shines upon it, the icon fully embodies it in a way that makes its description possible. Put in the present tense, as if the author has never lost sight of the majestic image—so powerful is its impact—the account resembles a verbal and theological cinematography where Christ's radiant divinity reveals not only his icon but also that of the Theotokos. The luster of the mosaic and that of the teaching that restored it are indistinguishable. From his position over the imperial throne and inside the painting, Christ conveys the truths that made his image possible.[55] The icon's luminance is as much theological and intellective as it is aesthetic.

The Platonist Michael Psellus (1018–1078) was a master of *ekphrasis* and precise observer of the personalities and art of his time. Psellus found in Homer and Greek philosophy a depository of Christian allegories and never tired of voicing his admiration for Greek wisdom.[56] But he seemed to have recognized in an icon of the Crucifixion the refutation of the Platonic view of images as semblances of distinct archetypes. The reason was its liveliness and dynamism:

> … the icon is full of life and nowhere lacks movement. If one lets one's eyes rest successively on different parts, one can see them change, grow larger and move … Thus the dead man seems to be alive, yet one sees precisely what is dead …[57]

Psellus places the cause of the icon's "beauty" (*kallos*) and "transcendent luminosity" (*hyperphyos apolampei*) in a tension between "contrast" (*antilogies*) and "harmony" (*euarmostias*) rather than in its suggestive nature of colors.[58] Even though this view of beauty recalls the radiant emanation of the One taught by Neoplatonism, Psellus goes on to explain the liveliness of the icon in terms similar to the Ch'an ideal of *chi'yun* (spirit resonance), using a combination of Platonic and Christian terminology:

> Although this living painting (*empsychos graphe*) is built up from the skillful composition of such parts, the appearance of life (*empsychon eidos*) goes beyond

55 On the importance of physiognomic details for Byzantine viewers see Kazdhan and Maguire, "Byzantine Hagiographical Texts," pp. 8–9.

56 His description of the Empress Zoe "Her eyes were large, set wide apart, with imposing eyebrows. Her nose was inclined to be aquiline, without being altogether so. She had golden hair, and her whole body was radiant with the whiteness of her skin …" is an accurate description of her portrait in mosaic in the Hagia Sophia. Michael Psellus, *Chronographia*, trans. E.R.A. Sewter (New Haven, 1953), pp. 116, 6–7.

57 Belting, pp. 528–529. For an in-depth discussion of this *ekphrasis* and Psellus' interest in anatomical precision see Charles Barber, "Living Painting, or the Limits of Painting? Glancing at Icons with Michael Psellos," in Charles Barber and David Jenkins (eds.), *Reading Michael Psellos* (Leiden, 2006), pp. 116–130.

58 Belting, p. 529. Myrto Hatzaki, *Beauty and the Male Body in Byzantium: Perceptions and Representations in Art and Text* (London, 2009), pp. 78–79.

> such means. The icon lives on the one hand from the fact that it imitates [life] from art, and on the other in that it does not merely copy it but reproduces it in spirit through the influence of grace (*charis*). What use now is Plato's comparison of images with shadows?[59]

The notion that the Christian image refutes the aesthetic ideas of Greek philosophers—and no less an authority on matters spiritual than Plato—may be a sincere opinion in this particular case as Psellus marvels at the icon's unique ability to show "Christ living, at his last breath … at once living and lifeless (*empsychos, apsychos*)."[60] It is interesting that his explanation of the icon's extraordinary liveliness in this case agrees with his description in another work of a friend's personality that combines opposites in a way that recalls sculpture: "[the sculptors] had so arranged the eyes on either side that they seemed to be both still and in movement."[61]

In fact, on at least two occasions in Psellus' well-known Crucifixion *ekphrasis*, the exceptional liveliness of the icon's presence is described as "*enarges*." Charles Barber translates the term to mean clear or clarity, referring to the icon's resemblance of its original. A more careful consideration of the context and of the term's history, as we have seen, would suggest a very different meaning. Psellus' expression "*tes emphereias to enarges*" identifies the quality in the aesthetic object (i.e., its rendering of Christ's body) that ensouls it or brings it to life, suggesting the painting's exceptional animating powers.[62] This is also the sense in which the term is used again to characterize the movement between liveliness and rigidity (*empsychon kai nekron*) that the painting achieves.[63] The divine body is "*enarges*" in that it motions toward life even as it appears dead. This is something that painting accomplishes, and is as such an aesthetic phenomenon.

Psellus' self-confessed love of art—he admits stealing icons from churches—may be understood as a true statement or as an attempt, as elsewhere, to convince his critics of his piety.[64] Either way, he seems quite aware of the aesthetic qualities that impart on images and statues' life-like forms.[65] Moreover, despite his mostly rhetorical interest in theology, the Crucifixion *ekphrasis* is theologically astute as it affirms Christ's theanthropy at the very crucial moment of his Passion, while at the same time recognizing in art the ability to depict the most profound truths of Christianity (see Photius' *ekphrasis* in the next chapter).

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59 Belting, p. 529.

60 Ibid., p. 529. Kaldellis' point is worth keeping in mind: "Psellus' interest in 'physical appearances,' and beauty was not innocent. It too was a self-conscious correction of Christian attitudes." Kaldellis, p. 217.

61 Kaldellis, p. 213.

62 Barber, "Living Painting or the Limits of Painting?"

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 This is also the view of Anthony Cutler and Robert Browning, "In the Margins of Byzantium? Some Icons in Michael Psellos," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 16 (1992): pp. 21–32.

Finally, very impressive from an aesthetic and theological point of view is a poem by Manuel Philes (c. 1275–1345) of Ephesus. It focuses on an icon in encaustic and describes it in terms of its actual physical formation but with due attention to its aesthetic qualities. The molten beeswax and pigments are visualized at the moment that they are being applied to the panel's prepared linen foundation (*hyphasma*). The image has the appearance of a ghost but it is also an unmistakably aesthetic object. It exists somewhere between the icon's physical surface and its own animated form. The opening lines suggest that it may have been captured while floating in space or that it lost its way and walked right into its own picture:

> What might this be? In what way and by what art did you find yourself, a faint and shadowy image (*eikon amydra skiodes*), gripped in the weaving of a humble (*eutelous*) woof? And how did the wax, melted by the flame, not burn the inflammable cloth upon which it fell, but artfully shaped (*plastikos*) this, your form (*typos*)? Ah, Mary, how you transform nature: you, who once appeared in the guise of a bush unconsumed by flames, now paint yourself in this strange fire; and here Christ himself pours from above a secret dew on the torch's flame so that the viewer who gazes at the image may escape the passions' ghostly flame.[66]

The poem addresses the image (*eikon*) directly, as if it were its interlocutor, and describes it as "faint and shadowy" (*amydra*, *skiodes*)—possibly a reference to its impressionistic, ambient form and subtlety or, perhaps, to its aged, faded colors.[67] An analogy is drawn between the biblical image of the burning bush and the figure of Mary that is portrayed in the panel. Both are described dynamically, as acts initiated by their subjects. Pre-figuration in Scripture and figuration in art (encaustic) are instances of theophany. The Virgin is emerging out of the gleaming flames and is being painted in color at the same time—as actually happens in the encaustic technique. It is simultaneously an act of art and the epiphany of a holy person. Word and image are equally receptive to the Virgin's presence but art's openness is far more tangible and graphic.

Like Mary who paints herself in her own picture and brings it to life, Christ participates in the physical act of painting his Mother's image, by allowing sufficient moisture to moderate the flame and not burn the icon's linen surface. The image forms spontaneously like an *acheiropoietos* but the contribution of human art to its formation is unmistakable. It suggests admiration for art's ability to create vivid divine realities out of matter. The allusion to the Incarnation is hard to miss and introduces a third "encaustic" act, that of the Holy Spirit carving Christ inside Mary's womb.

The contrast between the radiant intensity of the painting act and the nearly imperceptible, almost ghostly, character of the finished image is striking and can be used to underscore the ethereal presence of the holy figure it

[66] The translation with some modifications is by Trypanis. Trypanis, pp. 446–447. For the encaustic technique see Doxiadis, pp. 93–100. On Philes and his sources, see Maguire, "Truth and Convention in Byzantine Descriptions."

[67] Trypanis, pp. 446–447.

depicts. Mary's appearance in art and Scripture pales in front of her person which in true mystical form is not fully revealed. In the poem's last line, visual contact with the image has a soothing, calming and cleansing effect on body and soul. The viewer's rescue from the flames of passion (*pathon floga*) underscores the extent to which the painting, through divine grace and human art, embodies its holy subjects and participates in their sacred life.[68] One enters the interior life of the image as if it were a window or door to the transcendent reality that animates it. The intensity of the experience recalls a hymn by Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022), written nearly three centuries earlier that draws a distinction between images imbued with passion and those in which the human figure is depicted dispassionately (*apathes*).[69]

In Philes' poem, Mary's theological and scriptural personae (Mother of God and Burning Bush) are physically and pictorially active. With Christ's help, they determine the material processes that create the painting, and the way that the viewer will experience it. Implicit in the dense imagery is a distinction between the physical and aesthetic object. The two make up the icon in a mystical synergy analogous to the one that formed God's image in the Virgin's womb. The portrait, still forming as the poem speaks, dynamically captures the likeness and mystical life of its subject. Art and life, figure and person are in such instances indistinguishable.

The use of intricate analogies and metaphors to elucidate the relationship between art and theology, and describe the transference of transcendent realities to physical form in art and life, has conceptual, logical and rhetorical advantages. Conceptually, it establishes parallels between the two without the need to create a new aesthetic vocabulary or probe the image analytically. One who understands how encaustic works, and what paintings made with that technique look like and can achieve in terms of their aesthetic form, will understand the Incarnation better. An appreciation for the similarities between divine and human art will enhance both theological and aesthetic reflection.

Logically, it makes sense to try and elucidate the work of the Holy Spirit by using the image of fire slowly shaping the likeness of the Mother of God on a wax tablet. In encaustic, the flame is repeatedly used to fix the layers of pigment and wax that are applied on the panel surface and to achieve the translucent quality that is characteristic of the medium. The softness and plasticity of the molten wax is an apt metaphor for the spiritual virtues of humility and faith which make the Incarnation possible and define Christian spirituality. From a rhetorical standpoint, the recourse to imagery and the

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68 Ibid.

69 The full human anatomy of Christ can be depicted in an image that shows nakedness as "immobile, innocent, and without passion (*apathes*)." Here the distinction is not, as Kazhdan and Maguire suggest, between nakedness and passion but between two different ways of depicting the naked body. Kazhdan and Maguire, "Byzantine Hagiographical Texts."

multiple levels at which the poem's analogies operate impart a riddled quality to it that intrigues the reader and prompts reflection.

The lack of an art critical literature in Byzantium is problematic from our perspective but it does not suggests a lack of aesthetic sophistication in the experience of art, as we can see from these exceptional insights. With characteristic spontaneity, like an *acheiropoietos*, the icon brings to life holy persons and the transcendent realities that inform their lives. Reference to the encaustic technique helps the reader focus on the aesthetic aspects of the comparison without losing sight of its theological significance. Here, as in real life, image and holy person become, for a few moments at least, indistinguishable. The image bears in its structure the *logos* or pattern of the Virgin's holiness. Needless to say, what Philes does in this instance is not common. But it makes clear the need to approach what the Byzantines had to say about art with fewer preconceptions and a greater eagerness to glean their aesthetic views from a variety of directions and sources. This approach may lack the rigor that we have learned to expect from art criticism but it is very much in the spirit of Orthodox tradition.

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PART IV

THEOPHANY AND ART

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12

Human and Divine Luminaries

Ekphraseis and epigrams that we examined in the previous chapter show a fascination with the luminous qualities of icons and with the presence in them of lively or vivid form. Color was also an important element, as we recall from Damascene and from the Philes *ekphrasis* where its use in encaustic painting becomes an intricate theological metaphor. In theology, the poetry of St. Symeon the New Theologian recorded his visions of uncreated light and encounters with Christ in unprecedented detail. In the next two centuries, luminosity, color and liveliness became dominant themes in Byzantine secular poetry and literature.

This aesthetic, as we shall see next, had its origins in classical painting while its theoretical aspects were entertained by Plato, Aristotle and their philosophical heirs. As we look at this remarkable convergence of aesthetic and spiritual experience, it is important to remember the topos of Lycomedes and Plotinus. Aesthetic form pales in front of the vision of God. But when form has all the qualities that are intimated in Philes' poem and light permeates it as we saw in the *Chrysotriklinos* icon, it is possible to find in art not just a semblance of theophany but a being capable of illuminating its nature by its own existence: the plastic luminary that we have associated with *enargeia* in Maximian ontology.

Naturalism and impressionism characterize Greek painting in the classical period, even though Cretan-style frescos, like the eighteenth-century B.C. painting of flying fish from Phylakopi, Melos, show an impressive mastery of lively form and composition.[1] In classical art, impressionistic and illusionistic effects rely principally on composition, abstraction, color and tonality. Placement and distance of objects and motifs in the picture frame and adjustments in color, tonality and clarity, are ways of simulating form and vitality in natural perception. High contrast, saturation and detail convey proximity while their opposites may be used to suggest an object's distant and elusive presence. A striking early fifth-century B.C. Greek fresco of a diver jumping from a tower into the sea (Color Plate 1; Figure 12.1),

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1 Martin Robertson, *Greek Painting* (Geneva, 1959), p. 21.



12.1 *Diver Jumping from a Tower into the Sea*, "Tomb of the diver," early 5th century B.C., Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Paestum, Italy

shows the use of abstraction, space and placement in composition to define movement and capture psychological, natural and spiritual realities, and in this particular case to draw a subtle analogy between diving and death, or perhaps diving and the soul's flight.

The diver's isolation and elegance, the graceful lightness of his body, the motioning trees painted also in red, and the swelling emerald sea below, create a world of serenity, simplicity and emptiness that suggests nothing of the somber and dark realities of death. Here, an air of transcending stillness and joy permeates everything, while a sense of harmony and communion between human and natural forms speaks of a world that is at once ideal and real. Caught in the air, as if in a snap shot, trees and diver are frozen in a moment of lasting liveliness while the diving act itself, left unfinished and in possession of its own time, continues forever, as long as the image endures. It is good to keep paintings like this in mind as we consider what Greek philosophers wrote about art.

Starting in the fifth century (particularly by Apollodorus and his pupil Zeuxis, b. c. 464 B.C.), color became more sophisticated as painters gradually refined the application of warm and cold colors, light and shadow and sought to convey expressive qualities and mood. This is evident, for instance, in paintings like the *Abduction of Persephone* c. 330–320 B.C. by Nichomachus (fresco, Vergina Archaeological Museum, Greece) and the *Funerary Stele of Hedyste* (3rd–2nd century B.C., Volos Archaeological Museum, Greece).[2] By the middle of the fourth century B.C., the atmospheric use of color prevailed and diffused light was used to enhance the plasticity of figures. Toward

[2] Pliny the Elder, *Chapters on the History of Art*, pp. 107–111, plates 61–66. Pliny the Elder, *Peri tes Archaias*, plates 17, 24.

the end of the century, we begin to see the masterful use of directed light in composition (e.g., the Pompeii mosaic depicting *Alexander and Darius in Battle*, based on a copy of a painting by Philoxenus).[3]

Accounts of works by famous painters such as Polygnotus, Parrhasius, Apelles, Protogenes and Zeuxis, among others, make it clear that the ability of a painting to convey emotion, character (*ethos*), physiognomy, presence and animated form was highly valued in Greek antiquity. Paintings won praise when they rendered nature and the human figure with compelling accuracy and liveliness and could in this sense be mistaken for real or surpass their originals in the concentration of physical, psychological and moral qualities.[4]

Interest in physiognomic portraiture of this type is shown by Socrates. In a purportedly actual conversation with the fifth-century painter Parrhasius, a master of the realistic style, Socrates tries to convince the painter that it is possible for moral qualities (*psyches ethos*) to be depicted in painting, since they are invariably depicted on people's faces.[5] Parrhasius' position that painting cannot convey psychological realities, a notion echoed by Damascene, is epideictically refuted by Socrates. He brings as evidence the concentration of moral qualities on the human face and the variety of expressions that form there. Painting in this view can depict anything that can be observed in nature: the more careful the observation, the more penetrating the form.

In the same spirit, Plato singles out the work of Parrhasius and Polygnotus for its ability to intimate the essential forms pursued by philosophy and criticizes the work of Apollodorus and Zeuxis, which he calls "*skiagraphia*" or painting in light and shade, for simulating the transient presence of objects in human experience.[6] The impressionistic use of light and shadow involved the laying on and fading out of shades of color to render an object's proximity, distance, atmospheric qualities and texture. The effect was at odds with Platonism's emphasis on painting as a means of representing the basic forms of reality and registering ideal types and behaviors. Polygnotus' paintings, exemplified by his panels in Delphi, with their precise and austere depictions of heroes from Greek myth and history, had an obvious didactic and edifying function that Plato approved.[7]

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3 For the use of color and light in Greek painting in the context of Pliny's account, see Pliny the Elder, *Peri tes Archaias*, pp. 322–323, 189–194, plates 3, 34.

4 Pliny the Elder, *Chapters on the History of Art*, pp. 110–115, plates 66–71.

5 The exchange is recorded by Xenophon in *Memorabilia* 3.10.1–5. J. Pollitt, *The Art of Ancient Greece: Sources and Documents* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 155–156. Pollitt, *The Ancient View*, pp. 184–185.

6 On the meanings of *skiagraphia* see Pollitt, *The Ancient View*, pp. 247–254, 44–45. Apollodorus and Zeuxis were opposed by their more conservative contemporary Parrhasius who stood closer to Plato's standards in the *Republic* (Book X, 602C–603B). This kind of painting is not unlike the images of the Cave puppeteers (*thaumatopoios*) in *Republic* 514B, discussed in connection with poetry in Thayer, "Plato's Quarrel with Poetry." In *Poetics* (1450a) Aristotle agrees with Plato. Composition and narrative are more important than plastic qualities. Bruno, pp. 31–35.

7 For restorations of Polygnotus' Delphi panels (plaques or wall paintings), see Pollitt, *The Art of Ancient*, pp. 127–130, 135–137; Bruno, p. 10.

Aristotle took a similar position in favor of the realistic style, arguing that it can render character better than its rival. Thus, he complimented Polygnotus as a genuine "*ethographos*," a painter of character, and criticized a work by Zeuxis for failing in that regard: "… but the painting of Zeuxis contains no character at all."[8] Comparing the work of Zeuxis with certain plays, he applied the same critical principles to pictorial and literary works, and criticized paintings and plays with strong expressive and atmospheric qualities for their failure to describe tersely the actions that defined the *ethos* and personality of characters.[9]

Plato rejected vivid images as a form of illusionism or magic (*thaumatopoiia*).[10] Art was an instrument of metaphysical gnosis and a corrective device for fallible human perception, committed to the service of philosophy. It had no license to create its own beings or generate a rival reality to that of the philosopher's art. As the use of the term *thauma* suggests in this context, Plato did not oppose images which were life-like in the sense of replicating nature. What he opposed, rather, was images which have *a life of their own* and may be said in this sense to "impersonate" (*mimeitai*) their subject (be it animate or inanimate) that is, to bring it to life or present it in a dynamic state of being.[11]

The Byzantines insisted on art's mnemonic and anagogical function, but they did not consistently embrace the Platonic view. Plato rejected the impressionistic use of color in *skiagraphia* for its detrimental effect on the soul's equilibrium. By contrast, *ekphraseis*, as we have seen and shall see in more detail below, associated color, shading and illumination with a painting's ability to convey the presence and experience of transcendent realities in Christian life, particularly the presence of holy persons. Thus in Byzantine sources the term "*charakter*" is consistently used with reference to depictions of holy figures—particularly their facial expression and posture—that create the impression of a living being.[12]

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8 *Poetics* (1450a24); Pollitt, *The Ancient View*, p. 185.

9 *Poetics* (1450a). Aristotle was concerned about the lack of an integral, plot driven "ethical element" in contemporary tragedies. *Aristotle's Poetics*, trans. James Hutton (New York, 1982), p. 51.

10 In the *Republic* (602CDE) *skiagraphia* is dangerous for exactly this reason.

11 On *mimesis*, *thauma* and its cognates in Plato and other sources, see Pollitt, *The Ancient View*, pp. 37–39, 189–191. In *Phaedrus* (275de) lifelikeness is granted in painting but its limitations are also noted. Plato's objective is to undermine the effect of written discourse on the soul as compared with oral communication rather than comment on the expressive qualities of painting.

12 In such contexts *charakter* implies immediate recognition and presence. In Damascene: "and everywhere we present to the senses his figure (*charakter*), the figure of the incarnate God Logos …"; PG 94:1248C. In Theodore the Studite *charakter* refers to the presence of the archetype in the image that depicts it. Mango, *The Art*, p. 173. Fr. Justin of St. Catherine's Monastery at Sinai: "I like to think of icons as reflections: in the classical sense where a mirror image was considered real, not illusory. It's like a presence of the figure depicted." *New York Times*, Sunday, November 12, 2006, 32. The relationship between *charakter* and *morphe*, both suggestive of self-manifestation, will be discussed later. See also Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven, 2000), pp. 63–64.

St. Eupraxia, for example, has a vision of Christ's "despotic figure" (*despotikos charakter*) in which he appears in his reigning, hieratic attributes as a commanding and sublime presence.[13] We read in the vita of St. John Chrysostom, that he owned an icon of St. Paul in which the apostle's presence was so compelling that it caused him to engage it in conversation. When his disciple, Proclus, looks at the image and brings to mind a vision of Paul that he had earlier, he finds the same "*charakter*" in both.[14] To dream Paul and see Paul in art is to encounter the same living reality. What art achieves in such instances is replicated in one's sleep by the work of divine grace. A painting that can accomplish this exists in the world but also in eternity.

Skiagraphia is used in a similar context in stories of miraculous paintings that have been inspired by holy visions. In one such example, the painter first dreams of the monastery in which a miraculous Saint (St. Theodora of Thessaloniki, d. 892) lived. He then goes to the actual location. In a second dream, he "has the impression of sketching" her figure (*skiagraphounta*).[15] The artist paints in his sleep what he paints when he is awake. The image forms as an aesthetic object in a dream act and is part art, part revelation. The picture will be true to its subject because it has already been painted. Actually, it will capture it in its ideal form: "Assisted by God's guidance and the Saint's prayers, he depicted her in such a form that those who had know her well asserted that she looked like that when she was young."[16]

The picture's theophanic nature is established when fragrant oil begins to bleed from the palm of the Saint's hand. Thus, the picture goes through three stages. It is first miraculously painted in a dream where it exists as mental object, or vision. Then, it becomes art. In the third stage, it acquires an organic, somatic reality and function. Although the story emphasizes the accuracy of the painting, the central point is its increasingly vivid, lifelike character, defined successively by its miraculous inception, masterful execution and miraculous life. As in the Philes story, theophany enters the substance and process of art.

Byzantine painting used the "Graeco-Roman *koine*," a blend of classical and Hellenistic styles that Roman artists adapted to their own needs.[17] Impressionism and realism were part of its repertory. Impressionism was ideal for the iconography of theophanic realities. The realism favored by Parrhasius (and Plato and Aristotle), on the other hand, was ideal for the countless feast cycle and narrative icons which defined the identities and dramatized the lives of Christ, the Virgin Mary, apostles and saints. The clusters of interacting, idealized heroes in the scenographic paintings of Polygnotus, caught in succinct actions and gestures that define their

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13 PG 94:1272D.
14 PG 94:1272C.
15 Mango, *The Art*, pp. 210–211.
16 Ibid., p. 211.
17 Kitzinger, "The Hellenistic Heritage in Byzantine Art."

personality and character, had a stylized, timeless and contemplative quality that was appropriate for a hieratic art.[18] By contrast, the impressionistic use of color and light in *skiagraphia* that made the fruit Zeuxis painted the prey of birds, was appropriate for expressing visually the type of religious experience that placed human encounters with holy figures in an actual and present time.[19] Like Zeuxis' irresistible grapes, the visions and icons of Eupraxia, Proclus and others were sights of presence rather than representation. Mental and physical imagery, holy vision and art were, at least at first appearance, indistinguishable.

We turn next to the role that color and light played in the experience of images in Byzantium. A sixth-century *ekphrasis* by Agathias praises a Constantinopolitan icon of the Archangel Michael in encaustic. It attributes the strong response it elicits in the viewer to its colors. The Archangel, described as "the invisible chief of the angels," is said to exist in the image despite "the incorporeal essence of his form," a remarkable feat called "greatly daring."[20] Tension between the sensuousness of the painted figure and its intangible original—between aesthetic and theophanic form—intensifies the viewer's experience. But the incredible serves to establish the credible. The aesthetic takes over and the tension is resolved: "engraving within himself (*en eauto ton typon eggrapsas*) the [archangel's] form, he trembles as if he were present (*hos pareonta*)."[21] Art has channeled the holy being into the viewer's mind. Its emotional impact is especially intense, as one would expect of a real encounter.

Vision engenders contemplation ("the eyes encourage deep thoughts") as color helps transform the aesthetic experience (*techne chromasi porthmeusai*) into prayer (*ikesien*) and "higher contemplation (*kressoni phantasie*)."[22] Glowing, shimmering colors can suggest affective and intellective states. They can also recreate the kind of abstract and fluid imagery that is the dominant quality of dreams and holy visions. What Agathias finds amazing about the icon is the fact that it can transcend its own material conditions (i.e., the physical nature of the panel and pigments that constitute it) and exist in the same disembodied form as its holy subject. The object that he is identifying here is aesthetic. It is that part of the icon that escapes the panel and takes on the appearance of something living and real. As with *enargeia*, it is something that the image delivers by means of its inherent qualities and structure. Color is its predominant element, that which most conveys the experience of an apparition. But what Agathias describes is not possible without the contribution of other qualities.

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18 Pollitt, *The Ancient View*, p. 189.

19 Pliny the Elder, *Chapters on the History of Art*, pp. 109–11, plates 65, 66. Pliny the Elder, *Peri tes Archaias*, pp. 316, 189–190.

20 Pliny the Elder, *Chapters on the History of Art*, p. 115. *Greek Anthology*, vol. 1, pp. 21–22 (34).

21 *Greek Anthology*, vol. 1, pp. 21–22 (34).

22 Ibid.

The fact that the icon is in encaustic and comes from the same period as the Sinai *Pantocrator* (discussed earlier) may give us some clues as to the kind of image that Agathias is describing. In the best of Fayum portraits, we see the ground painted progressively from dark to light, a luminous rendering of the face, modeling achieved by highlights, nuanced rendering of shadows, an evident plasticity and dynamism, a rich palette of colors and an overall impressionistic and painterly quality. Warm and cold colors are used to show objects advancing and receding relative to the viewer, creating proximity and distance respectively. The overall effect is one of animated expression and intimacy, with faces marked by larger than usual eyes projecting their presence beyond the painted surface in a manner that invites conversation and contact.[23] In some cases, color is rendered with intense dynamism and energy that allows it to solidify form, even as the overall effect is impressionistic. In others, strongly highlighted areas in the flesh, often reflected in the pensive brightness of the figure's eyes, give color surfaces a lively and transient quality that nearly eliminates volume and depth.[24] It is highly plausible that Agathias' icon had some if not most of these qualities.

The description by the Patriarch Photius (858–867, 877–886) of a ninth-century mosaic of the Theotokos with the Christ child on the apse of the Hagia Sophia (Figure 12.2) reflects a similar sensibility. The homily was delivered at the mosaic's official unveiling on March 29, 867, in the presence of Emperors Michael III and Basil I and the charged atmosphere of post-Iconoclastic restoration. Flanked by two standing Archangels each 5m tall, the 4m tall Theotokos rises 30m from the ground and is surrounded by a field of gold tesserae that covers the entire semi-dome.[25] Only fragments of the Archangel Michael remain, but the delicate face and part of the highly textured wings of the Archangel Gabriel are still visible. Light falls on the mosaic from a row of five windows set immediately below it and from windows above it on the dome.

Photius' homily is considered by many to have little aesthetic significance. Maguire points out that the topos of contrary emotions, affection and detachment is assigned to the Virgin despite the fact that her expression is impassive.[26] This and similar observations lead others to conclude that Photius was only using the image to bring attention to the role of Mary in the Incarnation, and remind his audience that images are justified by the Incarnation.[27] I believe that Photius is accurately describing the mosaic's

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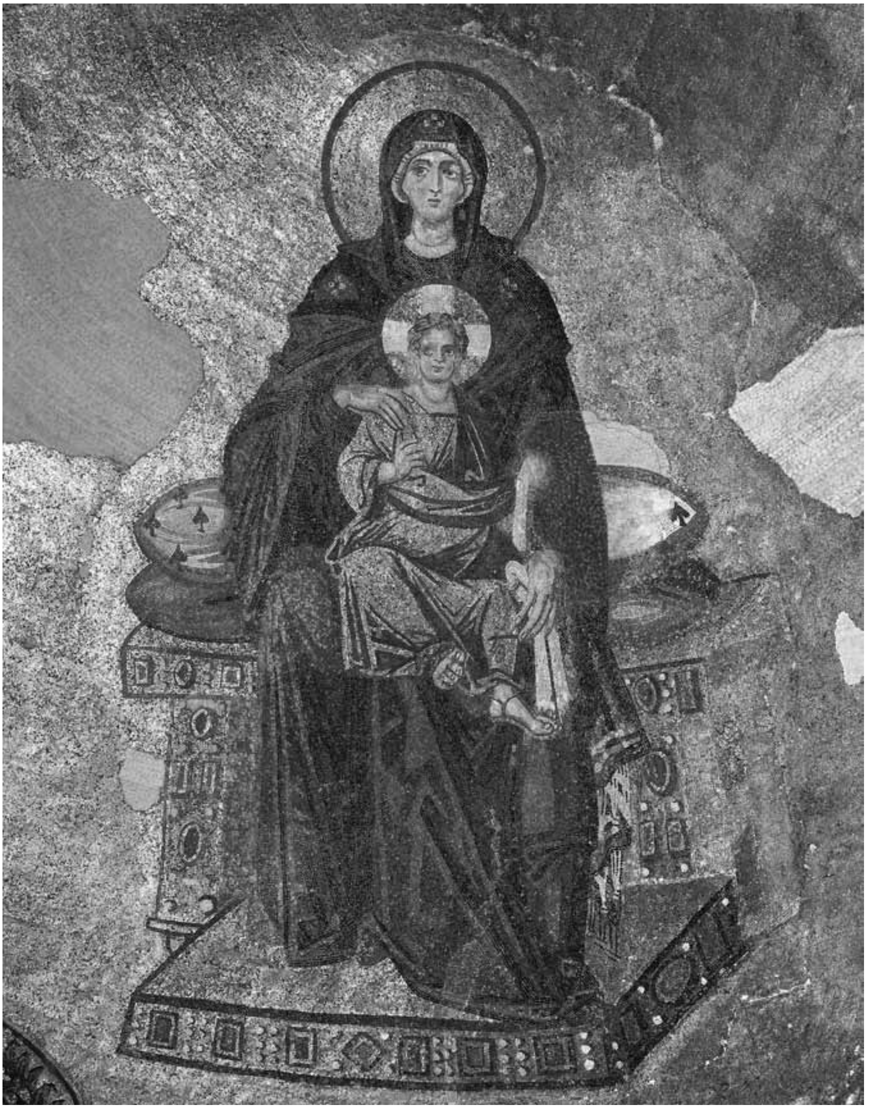
23 Doxiadis, pp. 91–93.

24 The portrait of a Serapis priest (c. 138–161) is an example of the first type; a portrait of a soldier from the same period (c. 138–192), of the second. Ibid., pp. 49, 23.

25 See the detailed description of the apse mosaics in Cyril Mango and Ernest J.W. Hawkins, "The Apse Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 19 (1965): pp. 113–151.

26 Maguire, "Truth and Convention in Byzantine Descriptions."

27 James and Webb, "To Understand Ultimate Things." "'Life-likeness' is not an aesthetic judgment; it is a conceptual necessity." See James, "Senses and Sensibility in



12.2 *Theotokos and Child*, Mosaic from the Apse, 834, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, Turkey

aesthetic qualities and expressive form.[28] Maguire compares post-Iconoclastic paintings to black and white photographs which are more abstract than color photographs and argues that Byzantine viewers compensated for an empty visual field by exaggerating physiognomic details.[29] It is a wrong analogy. Based on their own tonal scale, black and white photographs can

Byzantium," *Art History*, 27/4 (2004): pp. 522–537. Thus Dagron concludes that the intimate and expressively complex twelfth-century mosaic of Christ from the *Great Deesis* in the Hagia Sophia is "condemned to sublimity." Dagron, *Décrire*, pp. 73–77.

28 For Photius' reliance on Platonic aesthetics, see B.N. Tatakis, *Meletemata Christianikes Filosophias* (Studies in Christian Philosophy) (Athens, 1981), pp. 131–132. See also Mango and Hawkins, "The Apse Mosaics of St. Sophia."

29 Kazhdan and Maguire, "Byzantine Hagiographical Texts."

be as rich as color prints, or on occasion even richer. Likewise, a painting deemed abstract by naturalistic standards may be highly expressive based on color tone, shading, texture, rhythm, use of voids, tension etc. (as we shall see in discussing Modernist and Zen art in Chapters 14 and 15). The Hagia Sophia mosaic musters a significant degree of expressive complexity behind its apparent (and distant) simplicity. It is difficult to convey in a few photographs the icon's continuous interaction with ambient light and the effect that dynamic illumination has on composition and expression.

Photius writes:

> to such an extent have the lips been made flesh by the colors (*diesarkothe ta xeile tes chromasin*), that they appear merely to be pressed together and stilled as in the mysteries, yet their silence is not at all inert neither is the fairness of her form derivatory, but rather is it the real archetype.[30]

The description is accurate. A pensive and eloquent quality is indeed present in the face of the main figure of the mosaic. It arises from the expression of her mouth and eyes and the overall vividness of her face. Her physiognomy actually conveys her hieratic character which is why it makes sense in this context to mention the picture's realization of the holy person it portrays. The opposites of motherhood (*meter*) and virginity (*parthenos*), childhood (*tokos*) and divinity (*hyperphuei*), tenderness (*storge*) and detachment (*apathei*) that Photius attributes to the mosaic are not just rhetoric.[31] They actually convey visual facts. The description "a virgin's and mother's gaze (*omma*)" is corroborated visually. So is the attribution of a "detached and imperturbable mood (*diatheseos*)" to her face and posture.[32]

The rosy blush on the cheeks and chin, and the brighter red on the lower lip define the lower part of the woman's face. Her large, boldly outlined eyes and eyebrows dominate the upper part that is framed by the closely drawn line of the head covering. Shading defines the chin, lips, the fine classical nose, the area near the tear ducts, and over the brighter lower part of the eyelids. When illuminated, the reds become more dominant, the flesh tones more even, and the shading above the eyes darker and more prominent. This makes the eyelids appear heavier and adds an attentive and pensive expression to her intense gaze. The slight downward motion and large irises of the eyes convey a sense of awe and guarded melancholy.

A substantial, monumental maphorion drapes the figure with dynamic, imposing angular shades of blue, purple and black. It gives to the youthful face that emerges from underneath, an air of gravity and somberness, qualities that are also reflected in its gaze. The left hand that embraces and holds the child is freely modeled, while the wrist and fingers of her right hand convey

30 Mango, *The Art*, p. 187. For the Greek text, see Vasileios Lourdas (ed.), *Photiou Homiliae* (Thessaloniki, 1959), p. 167.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

a delicate and graceful gesture that is both light and reverent. Majesty and humility, youthfulness and gravity, tenderness and thoughtful detachment, alertness and tranquility, are readily visible. Christ's crown-like golden locks, round face, large forehead, blushing cheeks and serene but alert gaze convey both docility and authority.

Mango's detailed description of the materials used for the composition of Christ's head proves the mosaic's technical and aesthetic sophistication:

> Fine- grained white marble is used for the projecting or highlighted parts, viz. the center of the forehead, above the eyebrows, one vertical row down the ridge of the nose and one transverse row across the top of the bridge, the tip of the nose, the top of the chin, and a few lines under the eyes. The grey vein of Proconnesian marble provides light shadows on the ridge of the nose (vertically, on either side of the white line), between the eyebrows, on the right side of the forehead (inside the green shadow line), under the eyes, and in a small patch to the left of the mouth. Three tones of pink marble are used, the palest mostly in the forehead, the two more intense tones in the cheeks and chin. Cream marble outlines the nose and nostrils … The eyebrows, eyelids, nostrils, and corners of the mouth are in slightly purplish black glass. The parting of the mouth is in deep red glass. Vermilion glass is used in the lips, small spots on the cheeks, a spot on the bottom part of the chin, and others on the right ear. The whites of the eyes are in white limestone.[33]

When illuminated by the light that comes from the windows above and below, the maphorion displays tones of blue, green, purple and black—reflecting the rich palette of glass used in its construction. As colors shift and transform, motifs acquire and lose solidity. Facial features become more colorful and translucent. Light and distance eliminate details and enhance abstraction. The image begins to float and fluctuate. Christ's face in particular gives the impression of emerging and taking shape out of sheer light. His brilliant white and gold halo, blond hair with golden highlights, gold and silver tunic and himation compliment and enhance his glowing face which appears ethereal and angelic, but also tenderly youthful and delicately carnal. His figure glows, at times giving the impression that it stands apart from the wall that hosts it, suspended between stretches of light and gold. Color is an aesthetic and theophanic reality. The illusion is not directed at nature but at the reality of divine presence and holiness. In 1347, the future Patriarch Isidore had a dream of the mosaic. The Theotokos came out of her seat, descended from the wall, pointed at the patriarchal throne, and after a few words of counsel resumed her original position on the wall.[34]

Another example is a poem on an icon by the celebrated twelfth-century painter Eulalius. It was composed by his contemporary novelist, philosopher and poet Theodorus Prodromus (c. 1100–c. 1158). It attributes to color the ability to render not just liveliness and expressiveness in a figure but also

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33 Mango and Hawkins, "The Apse Mosaics of St. Sophia."

34 Ibid.

the immateriality of physical form necessary to portray angelic figures. The subject of the icon was the Annunciation (possibly in the Monastery of *Christ Euergetes*). The image is described as being exceedingly vivid. To underscore this quality, the painting is attributed to the miraculous intervention of its central character. Like Christ who is portrayed as a painter of souls in the *Acts of John*, Mary takes over the painting act. She gives a speech-like liveliness to colors: "[not] the art of painting … but the Maiden who is celebrated among men has directed the brush of Eulalius and made his colors so expressive (*eulalon … to chroma deiknyei*)"; "You [O Virgin] … have let fall upon his brush a drop of breath."[35] Painter and painting are now integral members of Mary's own life—very much like the poem by Manuel Philes.

The image is refined and appropriately abstract in its depiction of the Archangel: "The colors have been altered in relation to the subject … the brush, as if it were made of some fine substance, delineates the incorporeal (*aylian*)."[36] The figure of the diaphanous angel contrasts with that of the young woman who is so sensuous and lively that she appears to stand next to her image as would a posing model. The painter's palette is sophisticated and evocative: "the colors are those of flesh (*sarkinos*) for they represent a live Maiden (*zoses kores*) … so great is the art of Eulalius as … to mix colors that are endowed with speech (*lalounta chromata*)." The distinction between image and original disappears. "The image is animated (*empsychos eikon*), for indeed you are being painted alive"; "it is a live painting, for verily you live O Virgin."[37] Realization replaces representation. Painting participates in a divine reality; it does not replicate it.

The language of Prodromus suggests an eye sensitive to aesthetic qualities. The emphasis on the eloquent liveliness of form, the idea of capturing an object in its act or moment of conscious existence, recalls the Ch'an concept of *chi'yün* or "spirit resonance," discussed earlier (see also Chapter 15). If the figure is being painted alive, its liveliness comes from the painter's ability to envision his subjects (Mary and the Archangel) in conversation and capture that moment with his brush. The picture realizes its objects in a space and time that belongs indistinguishably to art and divinity.

Prodromus' verse is the inspiration for a number of fourteenth-century epigrams by Nicephorus Callistus that also celebrate the work of Eulalius. We referred to this epigram earlier. Its subject is the Archangel Michael. The painter's brush is "dipped … in immateriality (*skaryphon eis aylian evapsen*)"—variants of this expression can be found in Prodromus (*vapsas to graphydion*

[35] Mango, *The Art*, p. 231. For the Greek text, see E.D. Miller, "Poesie inedites de Theodore Prodrome," *Annuaire de l'Association pour l'encouragement des études grecques en France*, 17 (1883): pp. 32–33.

[36] In a poem dedicated to Emperor Manuel I, Prodromus claimed that even the brush of Eulalius and two other celebrated painters of his time could not render his unique literary (and perhaps illustrating) gifts (see below). Mango, *The Art*, pp. 230–231.

[37] Ibid. See also Miller, "Poesie inedites de Theodore Prodrome."

eis aylian)—while the angel's figure is "hiding in colors his incorporeal nature (*chromasi ten aylon egkrypton*)."[38] The painting is said to "encompass the immaterial by means of colors (*synexei chromasi ten aylian*)"[39]

When combined, the last two phrases place the anagogical power of the image within the aesthetic object that it puts forth. The angel exists aesthetically. All one needs to do is to go where the image is. The angel is present there. Callistus recognizes the difference between the physical and aesthetic aspects of painting ("how is that matter can drag the spirit down?").[40] Through color, the image is said to convey corporeality at the same time that it annuls or conceals it ("else the spirit remains unobserved in his picture"). The tension adds to its vividness and presence and is consistent with the topos of contradictory conditions.

The Archangel materializes in front of the viewer as an unmistakably aesthetic-heavenly being. The visual object at hand does not differ from a vision. It is both life and art. In another epigram, Nicephorus praises a despotic icon of Christ in the Church of the Holy Apostles. A work of art, the painting is also a moment of theophany. The artist has seen Christ's face (*thea*).[41] In two other epigrams that echo Prodromus, an icon of the *Hodegetria* type is addressed directly with the phrase "you are alive (*zes*), pure maiden" and is described as standing before the viewer full of breath and life (*empneousa kai zosa chroais*).[42]

Literary classicism dominated Byzantine intellectual culture in the twelfth century. It explains Prodromus' extensive use of Homeric and classical language and poetry in his writing.[43] A passage in Pliny describes how Apollodorus of Athens (fl. 408 B.C.) first introduced light and shadow-based curvatures and "bestowed glory on the brush" by giving his figures "the appearance of reality."[44] Praising as celebrated a painter as Eulalius, Prodromus, who according to some scholars was also an illustrator, would naturally look to the topoi of antiquity for language that would best express his appreciation for the master's work.[45] A dedicatory epigram that he composed for an illustrated copy of his romantic novel, *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, uses a topos popular among other writers of the period. The writer is compared to a colorist who fails the standards set by the great masters of classical painting (i.e., Apelles, Praxiteles, or

38 Mango, *The Art*, p. 231. See also Miller, "Poesie inedites de Theodore Prodrome."

39 Mango, *The* Art, p. 231. For the Greek text see A. Papadopoulos Kerameus, "Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, XI, 46f. 16 (1902): pp. 46–47.

40 Mango, *The* Art, p. 231. See also Kerameus, "Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos," pp. 46–47.

41 Kerameus, "Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos."

42 Ibid.

43 Kaldellis, pp. 245–255.

44 Pliny the Elder, *The Elder Pliny's Chapters*, p. 105.

45 P.A. Agapitos, "Poets and Painters: Theodoros Prodromos' Dedicatory Verses of His Novel to an Anonymous Caesar," *Jahrbuch der Oesterreichischen Byzantinistik*, 50 (2000): pp. 175–181.

Polygnotus) but has no problem meeting those of contemporary artists.[46] A poem of his describes a candle spreading in thousands of rays its burning light (*myriaktinon selas*) next to an icon of the Virgin Mary while another celebrates the face (*prosopou*) of Maria Comnena and compares it to a radiant mirror (*katoptron*) sparkling with clarity and grace (*katharan kai peristilpnon charin*).[47]

Religious art was not the only area where luminous images came alive. In this passage from the eleventh-century romantic epic of *Digenes Akrites*, Digenes' wife is described as if she were a living painting:

The noble Girl her beauty overgleaming (*hyperastrapton*)
Brighter than peacock shone (*elampe*) and all the plants.
Her face had copied the narcissus hue (*chroian*),
And like a rose in bloom her cheeks were dawning (*exanetellon*),
Her lips showed forth a rose-flower (*anthos rodon*) just opening
What time begins the dawning of its cup (*anatellein*).
Curls that were riding just above her brows
Scattered about fair-flashing (*chrysoprepeis*) gleams (*aktinovolous*) of gold,
And joy unspeakable (*arretos*) was over all.[48]

A discriminating vocabulary is used to convey the liveliness of the woman's face at the moment that it impresses itself on the viewer and is captured, almost photographically, in words. Blooming, soft and rosy cheeks, a complexion white like the fresh petals of a flower in the morning light (the dramatic time in which this sight is recorded), a sensuous mouth (gently breathing or even on the verge of speech) and shiny hair (reflecting the ambient light), paint an image that is at once idealized and natural, detached and intimate. The association of these qualities with joy gives to the scene a paradisiacal character but it also resonates with the captivated gaze of the viewer who is thoroughly absorbed by the spectacle (and by his own proximity to it). But the image is real. Its subject is on the verge of breathing, speaking and moving even as it is being painted in so many colors and words.[49] In this sense, it is a spectacle only momentarily, as long as it has not yet risen or spoken or perhaps opened its eyes. A picture never rests because it has life in it.

Impressionistic and transcendent qualities in physical appearance are important in Anna Comnena's (c. 1083–c. 1148) *Alexiad* as is her mastery of color and light terminology:

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46 Ibid.

47 Wolfram Hörander, *Theodoros Prodromos: Historische Gedichte* (Wien, 1974), pp. 434, 459.

48 John Mavrogordato (ed.), *Digenes Akretes: Edited with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Oxford, 1956), pp. 164–165 (Book 6: 30–37).

49 James has shown that the Byzantines adopted the classical color scale and had a transcendental, ontological understanding of color. *Chroma* (color) is related to *chros* (skin) and *chroia* (hue), suggesting complexion and tonality. *Anthos* means both flower and color but also luster. James, *Light and Colour*, pp. 74–75, 79–80.

> … he (the child Constantine Ducas) was fair-haired with a milk-white complexion, suffused in the right places with a delicate pink (*erythrematos meston*), like that of a rose just bursting (*exastraptonta*) its sheath; his eyes were not light, but gleamed (*lampontes*) from under his eyebrows like those of a hawk's under a golden hood.
>
> … her (Maria Ducas) skin was white as snow … her complexion (*chroma*) was exactly like a spring flower (*anthos*) or a rose. And what mortal could describe the radiance (*augas*) of her eyes? Her eyebrows were well-marked and red-gold (pyres) … this queen's beauty, the radiance (*epilampousa*) of her grace and the charm and sweetness of her manners surpassed all description and all art.
>
> … her (Irene Comnena) face too shone with the soft glamour of the moon (*selenes apestilve feggos*) … the bloom of her cheeks was such that their rosy hue (*rodonian*) was visible even to those who stood afar off. Her eyes were blue, yet in spite of their gaiety (*charopon*) they were somewhat awe-inspiring … if in those olden days a man had said that this Empress was Athena in mortal guise or that she had glided down from heaven in heavenly brilliance and unapproachable splendour (*ouranias aigles kai aprositou marmaryges*) he would not have been far from the truth … The pupils of her eyes resembled a calm sea shining with the intense blue (*exaugazousa*) of quiet deep water; the white surrounding the pupils was extraordinarily bright (*antestilven*), thus giving the eyes an indescribable dazzling (*charin apelampon amachon*) and exquisite beauty.[50]

The portrait of the Empress Irene describes a being that is both celestial and human. She sparkles in those moments of her finite existence in which the unique person in her comes alive. She retreats into her own body and reality only to transcend them again and reach a tenuous ideality. Through it all, she remains alive—which is what her literary iconographer in this instance also aspires to do. This is an aesthetic of existence rather than representation. Rhetoric provides the framework but art provides the content. Like the icons of Mary and Gabriel, Irene inhabits two worlds at the same time but belongs to neither. Her portrait could be compared to an icon of the Virgin—or as Anna actually suggests, to the likeness of the goddess Athena.[51]

The heroines and heroes of *Digenes* and the *Alexiad* have fair, gleaming and delicate complexions, bright and lively eyes, fine eyebrows, tender and evocative mouths, gracefulness, kindness and restraint. With their intense and arresting gaze, they seem to exist in a state of openness and self-possession that makes them at once vulnerable and impenetrable. These exemplary persons emerge out of sparkling and glimmering surfaces, which at times reflect a moon-like light, an enveloping sunshine, or the warmth and energy of fire.[52] They are portrayed in a detached manner, as if the author is painting them

50 Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad of the Princess Anna Comnena: Being the History of the Reign of Her Father, Alexius I, Emperor of the Romans, 1081–1118 A.D.*, trans. Elizabeth A.S. Dowes (London, 1967), pp. 72, 74, 76–77. Greek text in *Annes Komnenes Alexias Tomos B'*, trans. A. Georgiadou (Athens, 1974). Anna had read Aristotle and was familiar with twelfth-century anatomy. Kaldellis, p. 249.

51 Comnena, p. 245. For a similar imagery in Homer, see Mavrogordato, p. lxxxi.

52 For similar patterns in archaic verse, see Tsakiridou, "Her Voiceless Voice."

alive in words and images, unaffected by their presence. Vivid and animated, they are either suffused in a delicate light like Digenes' wife, or sparkle with physical and moral brilliance, like Comnena's imperial family. They are as close to theophany as mortal beings can be.

The same aesthetic informs the experience of nature and architecture as we can see in this description of Digenes' palace.[53] "The ceilings with mosaics he all adorned,/Of precious marbles flashing with their gleam (*te aigle astraptonton*)/The pavement he made bright (*efaidrynen*) inlaid with pebbles."[54] The glassy, glittering texture of marble in the rooms and pavilions of the palace recalls a mirror: "shining marbles throwing gleams of light (*faeinon lian astrapovolon*)."[55] Constructed of precious onyx, its floors are described as having the diaphanous, crystalline texture of frozen water: "so firmly polished those who saw might think/Water was there congealed in icy nature (*hydor … pepegos eis krystallinon physin*)."[56]

Let us now turn to the poetry of Symeon the New Theologian.[57] Symeon has been described as "the best known of all the Byzantine ascetics of the middle and later periods," "the greatest of the Byzantine mystical writers," and "a kind of virtuoso of experiences of light."[58] His visions of divine light continue a tradition that dates back to Evagrius of Pontos and Macarius of Egypt. It became official for the Orthodox Church, following the Hesychastic controversies, in the fourteenth century in the writings of Gregory Palamas and his older contemporary St. Gregory of Sinai (c. 1265–1346). It builds on the experience of theophany in Christ's Transfiguration. When Christ appeared to his disciples on Mount Tabor immersed in divine light, there was no "addition" or "transformation" to his nature; he simply showed to the disciples "what He really was."[59] The light seen then was divine and uncreated light made visible by grace. Palamas explains: "when saintly

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[53] Mavrogordato, pp. 218–219 (Book 6: 45–58).

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Symeon the New Theologian, *The Ethical Discourses, Life, Times and Theology*, ed. Alexander Golytzin (3 vols, Crestwood, 1997), vol. 3, pp. 175–181. See also Kaldellis, pp. 186–187. Maximus was highly respected in the Comnenian court. A comparison of Maximian and Symeonian anthropology in Hilarion Alfeyev, *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 37, 41, 176–184, 226–241, 266–270. In the *Alexiad* the Empress Irene said: "… I myself do not touch these books without a tremor and yet I cannot tear myself away from them. But you wait a little and after you have dipped into other books, you will taste the sweetness of these." *The Alexiad*, Book 5: 9.

[58] Achrimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov), *O Aghios Silouanos o Athonites* (Essex, 1999), pp. 88, 150–189, 184–185, 339. Hussey, p. 18. Basil Krivochéine, *In the Light of Christ: St. Symeon the New Theologian* (New York, 1986), p. 9. Alfeyev, pp. 1–2. Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses*, vol. 3, pp. 176, 181–183. Andrew Louth, "Light, Vision and Religious Experience in Byzantium," in Matthew T. Kapstein (ed.), *The Presence of Light: Divine Radiance and Religious Experience* (Chicago, 2004), pp. 89–90, 101.

[59] G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text Compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Macarius of Corinth* (4 vols, London, 1995), vol. 4, pp. 424–425, 422.

people become the happy possessors of spiritual and supranatural grace and power, they see both with the sense of sight and with the intellect that which surpasses both sense and intellect."[60]

There is a subjective aspect in the *visio dei* which as Symeon tells us in the *Ethical Discourses* depends on one's spiritual state. A harsh, blinding light characterizes ecstatic illumination (*en ekstasei*) and appears to those who are new to the spiritual life—"*eisagogikon te eusebeia*," or at the early stages of reverence.[61] A marvelous, resplendent light permeates and envelops those steeped in a life of holiness. This light is substantive (*synesti*) and illuminates the recipient "symmetrically" (*photizon symmetros*) and "according to the measure that nature allows (*chorei*)."[62] It leads to a lucid and comprehensive vision (*kathora*, *theoria*) of temporal and eschatological realities. In contrast to ecstatic illumination that is experienced as harsh and unrelenting and causes one awe, the light which envelops those accustomed (*dianoigetai*) to divine union is measured and soft, and causes "delight and an inexpressible joy of heart (*anekfrasto thumedia kai agalliasei*)."[63]

Symeon's hymnography is the most detailed and poetic account we have of theophany in the Orthodox experience. It allows us to literally see what the Saint saw and appreciate its aesthetic, iconographic potential. As with *ekphraseis*, rhetoric and reality converge. And like Anna Comnena, his mastery of color and light terminology and visual discrimination are extraordinary. There is, of course, repetition and stylization. But, as with iconographic types, it is important to consider this aspect as a matrix for the outline of what is at times an exceptional imagery.

In Hymn XVI, uncreated light "sparkles (*apastrapton*)" in the saint's heart, but also surrounds him with "immortal splendor (*athanato aigle*)" and irradiates his body with "shimmering rays (*aktisi kataugazon*)."[64] His "face shines (*lampon prosopon*)" and every part of him turns "luminescent (*photoforon*)."[65] Warmth is implied in the light's "all-embracing (*kataphilein*)" quality which he describes as one of "delight and sweetness (*hedones*, *glykasmou*)."[66] In Hymn XVII, he sits at night in his cell, and describes its presence as "fiery (*pyr*)" and a "luminous cloud (*photos nephele*)" that turns into a "superlative sun (*helios apoteleitai*)."[67] It enters and "warms [his] soul

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60 Ibid., p. 424.

61 Syméon Le Nouveau Théologien, *Traités Théologiques et Éthiques, Sources Chrétiennes*, trans. Jean Darrouzès (Paris, 1966), pp. 415–420, 430–435. Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses*, vol. 1, pp. 74–78.

62 Syméon Le Nouveau Théologien, *Traités Théologiques et Éthiques*, pp. 420–425, 430–435.

63 Ibid., 445–450. The translation from the Greek is mine.

64 Syméon Le Nouveau Théologien, *Hymnes II, 16–40, Sources Chrétiennes*, trans. Louis Neyrand (Paris, 1971), p. 12 (Hymn 16:20–30).

65 Ibid., Hymn 16:30–35.

66 Ibid., Hymn 16:25–30. "In Symeon's imagery of light, warm and bright colours are thoroughly dominant. Symeon's light is not a cool luminescence of the moon, but is dazzling sunshine or the blazing radiance of fire." Alfeyev, p. 239.

67 Symeon the New Theologian, *Hymnes II*, p. 36, Hymn 17:319–330.

and inflames [his] heart (*psychen thermainei, kardian ekkaei*)."[68] Then, it "hovers like a brilliant star over (*aigle photophoros perieptatai*)" him and "irradiates [his] intellect (*noun lamprynousa*)" which likewise takes flight, seeking in vain a match for its "sublime vision (*theorias hypsos*)" in the created world below.[69] He describes a landscape spread in all directions, with vertical abysses and horizontal expanses (*ouranou*, *abyssous*, *eschata*).[70] The divine light eludes him, being "uncreated and ungraspable (*aktistou kai aleptou*)."[71]

At first, light is contained within Symeon's dark cell. Slowly it takes over his heart, expands into his intellect and spreads out beyond and above it to envelop and illuminate all things. Transported beyond the confines of his physical and mental existence, the Saint is led to a majestic contemplation of the created world that magnifies the transcendent nature of divine illumination. This is not a mere mental, imaginary reality. The senses continue to perceive a world that now appears different, a difference that is ontological and aesthetic. The predominant modality is positive: a theology of light and plenitude (and therefore revelation) rather than darkness and depletion.[72] Thus, everywhere light must come; everywhere it must be seen and felt and contemplated; everywhere things must become visible, if not transparent. Symeon had a following among Byzantine intellectuals, patricians and laymen and women who read his poetry, attended his sermons and sought his spiritual counsel.[73] It is unlikely that they left unimpressed with his vision of light and illumination as instances of theophany. Anna Comnena would have known about him and so, perhaps, would the monk who compiled the epic of *Digenes Akrites*.[74]

Variations of the same imagery appear in Hymn XXII. The divine light enters Symeon's soiled (*rypon*) and corruptible body and soul, and consumes them in flames (*flegeis hylen*). Even though it is immaterial (*aylos*), it mingles with matter. Merciful and loving, it turns from a blazing fire (*pyr*) into a cooling dew (*drosizeis*) and washes him clean.[75] Distant as a faraway and unreachable star, it is also within reach, intimately tucked in his heart where it is rekindled by divine grace. Its paradoxical nature is repeatedly made clear: "Believe me then to be perfectly formless light (*phos aschematiston*)/all simple (*haploun*), not composed, in nature undivided/in all ways inscrutable, within reach unreachable."[76]

Reminding the Saint of his ineffable and uncreated energies, God counsels him not to search for its causes in his own nature (*physin*) but instead to

68 Ibid., Hymn 17:328–329.
69 Ibid., pp. 36, 38, Hymn 17:330–370.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
72 Alfeyev, pp. 173–175.
73 Ibid., pp. 36–37, 41. Hussey, p. 19.
74 Mavrogordato, p. lxxxi.
75 Symeon the New Theologian, *Hymnes II*, p. 172, Hymn 22:28–39.
76 Ibid., p. 182, Hymn 22:146–164.

accept illumination as a supreme act of divine philanthropy (*philanthropos*).[77] Transfigured (*metaschematizomenos*) in his mercy, God appears to those who have purified their intellect (*noun kekathermenon*) as luminous as the sun; but to those who live in the dark night (*gnofon*, *nychta*) of the flesh, he is nothing more than a distant star.[78]

In Hymn XXIV, the divine presence is described in terms that suggest motion and activity: a "simple" and "sweet (*glyky*)" light, "self-revealing" and "self-uniting," "spiritually visible," "distant" and "intimate," resembling "springing water (*hydor vryon*)," "burning fire (*pyr flegon*)," etc.[79] In Hymn XXXV, the imagery recalls the radiant stillness of the glistening, crystalline floors and ceilings of Digenes' palace. Here, it is Christ who speaks of the divine light, the only visible aspect of the Godhead: "it takes a ray of my glory/ and a glimmer of my light/and at once, they're made divine/for like a mirror (*esoptron*) filled/with sun rays/or a crystal rock (*krystallinos lithos*) illumined / when midday sheds its light (*ellamptheis mesembrian*)/my divinity irradiant/ is received by everybody."[80] Theophany simulates the light of the midday sun which casts no shadows and envelops things in an even illumination. This is the light that makes Digenes' wife such an idyllic and ideal landscape of desire and appears intermittently in Comnena's iconography to turn her loved ones into ideal beings.

In Hymn XLV, the Holy Trinity speaks of its mysterious indivisibility and reveals the forms under which it is experienced:

> light, peace (*eirene*) and joy (*chara*), life (*zoe*), nourishment and drink; sunrise (*anatole*) and resurrection (*anastasis*), rest and ablution, fire and water, river, spring of life (*pege zoes*) and streaming water, bread and wine; true sun that never sets (*helios ontos adytos*), ever-shining star (*astron aeilampes*), an oil lamp shining (*lampas eklampousa*) inside the soul's abode.[81]

Participation in the divine light is as real as the consumption and taste of bread and wine in Holy Communion. Symeon actually uses this analogy to describe those who partake of the divine light (*metalavontes*, *koinonoi*, *symmetochoi*).[82] The experience is tangible and real. It is the entire person that participates in the life of God.[83]

In Symeon's poetry, faces radiate, stars sparkle, water and dew glitter, oil lamps and candles shine, and springing water glistens. When illumined, bodies become transparent and light, space expands, shadows are eliminated,

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77 Ibid., Hymn 22:160–165.

78 Ibid., pp. 182, 184, Hymn 22:164–170.

79 Ibid., p. 228, Hymn 24:15–25.

80 Ibid., p. 444, Hymn 35:53–60. The translation is mine.

81 Symeon the New Theologian, *Hymnes III, 41–58, Sources Chrétiennes*, trans. J. Paramelle and Louis Neyrand (Paris, 1973), p. 104, Hymn 45:30–40.

82 Ibid., p. 52, Hymn 42:190–194. On this analogy, see Louth, "Light, Vision and Religious Experience in Byzantium."

83 C.A. Tsakiridou, "Theophany and Humanity in St. Symeon the New Theologian and in Abū Hamid al Ghazālī," *International Journal of Orthodox Theology*, 2/3 (2011): pp. 167–187.

beings emerge from obscurity, vision is enhanced, the intellect is limpid like a mirror, and the senses experience delight and warmth. Though mystical, this world is not vastly different from the one that allows Anna Comnena to perceive her mother like a goddess and speak of her dazzling gaze and the splendor of her countenance, or has Digenes discover in his wife an abundance of grace that brings all nature to a consummate stillness and joy. Like the fire that warms the heart of the ascetic, the blushing cheeks of figures lingering on the verge of life—breathing their colors in front of a captivated viewer (as do the icons of the *Hodegetria* and the Annunciation discussed earlier) or quietly exuding a playful and innocent charm (as in Comnena's recollection of the Ducas boy)—are part of a reality in which theophany embraces humanity.

In closing this chapter we would be amiss not to mention church architecture. As Louth has argued, any discussion of light in Byzantine religious experience must take into account the liturgical function of Byzantine architecture.[84] Here again we can see the coherence of the Byzantine vision. The same aesthetic that informs Byzantine poems, hymns and literature shapes the architecture of church space. Digenes' palace was a mirror turned to nature. Byzantine churches were designed to reflect the divine life and bring persons and nature to a state of holiness. This architecture of immanent and transcendent light was not accidental. It resulted from an impressive alignment of geometry, theology and aesthetics.

Classical and Hellenistic antiquity influenced the training and curriculum of architects in Byzantium. Optical contrivances, the manipulation of the space surrounding a mosaic or fresco, and the need to adjust composition and construction to the needs of the perceiver, were commonplace. Anthemios, one of the architects of the Hagia Sophia, entertained elaborate optical and geometrical problems.[85] The historian and scientist Nicephorus Gregoras (c. 1290–1360) described the mosaic icon of Christ *Pantocrator* at the center of the Hagia Sophia dome (c. 1355) in highly technical terms: "… when one looks up [at the image] from below, one is unable [to apprehend] by sight its true proportions and transmit them to the mind, since sight is usually deceived by the interposition of distance between the spectator and the object seen …."[86] He then proceeded to give the exact dimensions of the mosaic and point out that on the basis of those values, "accomplished painters" will be able to calculate "using proportional analogy," the other measurements of the figure.[87]

Byzantine churches were oriented toward the point on the horizon in which the sun rises on the feast date of their dedication. As Iakovos Potamianos has shown, particular attention was given to the position of the sun at midday, on

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[84] Ibid.

[85] Potamianos, pp. 251–327. Mathew, *Byzantine Aesthetics*, pp. 23–37.

[86] Robert S. Nelson, "To Say and to See," in Robert S. Nelson (ed.), *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 143–168. Mathew, *Byzantine Aesthetics*, pp. 150–153. Mango, *The Art*, p. 249.

[87] Mango, *The Art*, p. 249.

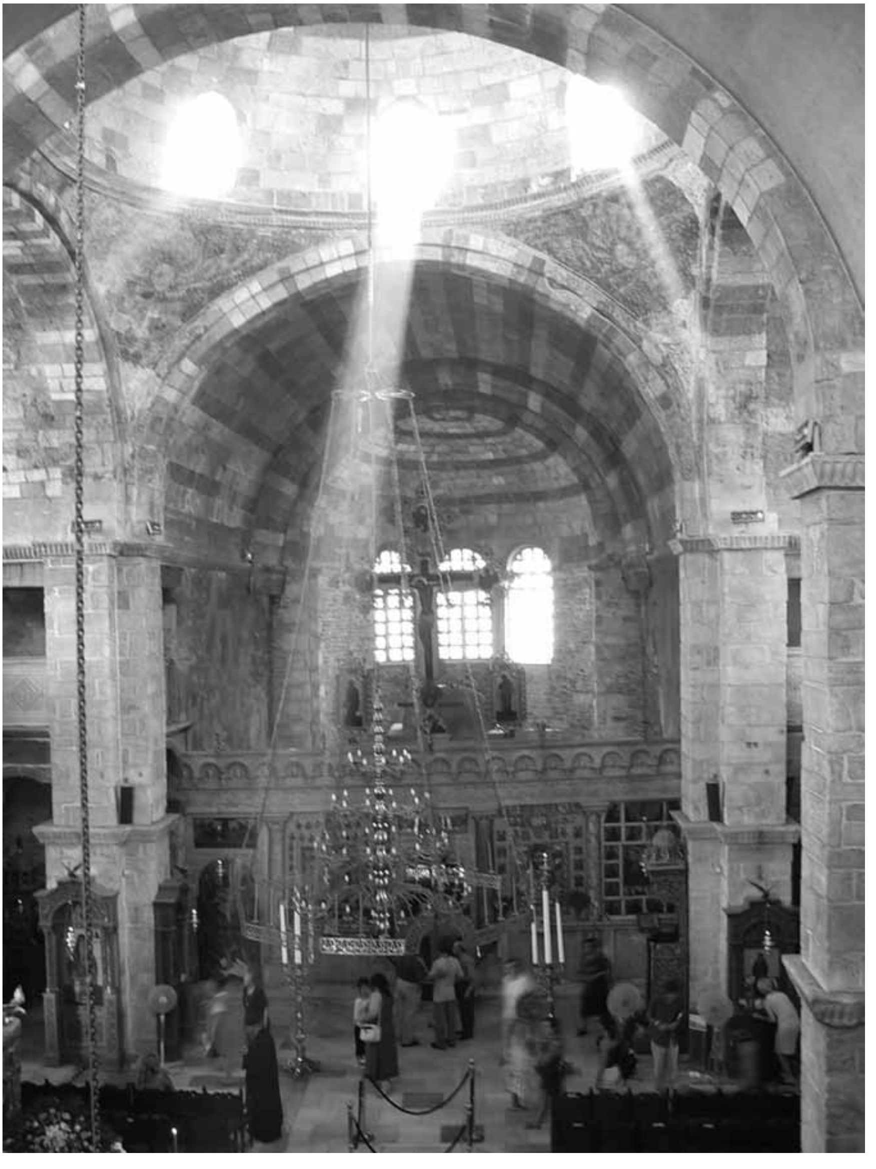
the third hour (9 a.m.) of the liturgical day, as well as on the illumination of the dome and the gradual descent of light on the illustrated walls.[88] Sills on dome windows were designed to direct sunlight from their lower position toward the icon of Christ *Pantocrator* which was looking down from the highest point. Since direct illumination was avoided, the incoming light was diffused and gave the impression that it was descending from its divine origin in the *Pantocrator* icon.[89] The entrance door was positioned toward the west, so that the setting sun could illuminate the iconostasis and holy doors as the priest carried the Gospel book back to the sanctuary at vespers.[90]

From the great church of the Hagia Sophia to the churches and chapels of Mount Athos, Byzantine architecture follows the "dynamic movement" of light throughout the day.[91] Beams of sunlight form transitional zones of illumination which direct perception upward, toward the dome and beyond it. They connect the interior of the church with the encompassing sky outside. Analogies to the divine presence are inevitable. Light descends from the dome during daytime and fades at dusk. Or, it enters from lower windows at noon when its flooding effect highlights some forms and throws others into obscurity. In those parts of the church that are not reached by sunlight, burning candles bring the holy figures they illuminate to life. As light travels from the windows at the base and sides of the dome, to reach painted and living faces, it stretches out into a luminous ladder.[92] For a few minutes, this thread of light unites art, life, nature and God.

Light models and paints. It brings stationary objects to movement and forms to liquidity. The sight of incense blending with the rays of the sun, or with the delicate scent of lit candles and oil lamps, the glittering icons and translucent marbles of the columns, iconostases and floors where natural and artificial designs surround and capture the eye, are all elements of a theology in which the divinization of beings is an act of ontological revelation. Theological and aesthetic realities become indistinguishable. But this is not aestheticism or religious spectacle. It is, rather, an ontophany. Everything is called upon to rise from obscurity and show itself in its full reality. As holy persons and the faithful standing next to them become visible to each other, they move from the tomb to a charismatic resurrection.

There are similar images in Symeon's poetry. In Hymn XXIII, he climbs a ray all the way to the blinding sun, only to lose grip of it and fall. As he sits weeping at night, the ray returns. "Like a rope descending from heavenly heights (*schoinion apo hypsous ouranious katavainei*)," it "traverses (*diaschisasa*)" the physical and spiritual "darkness (*zophon*)" in which he is immersed, and lifts him up again.[93] The swirling beam that cuts like a knife through

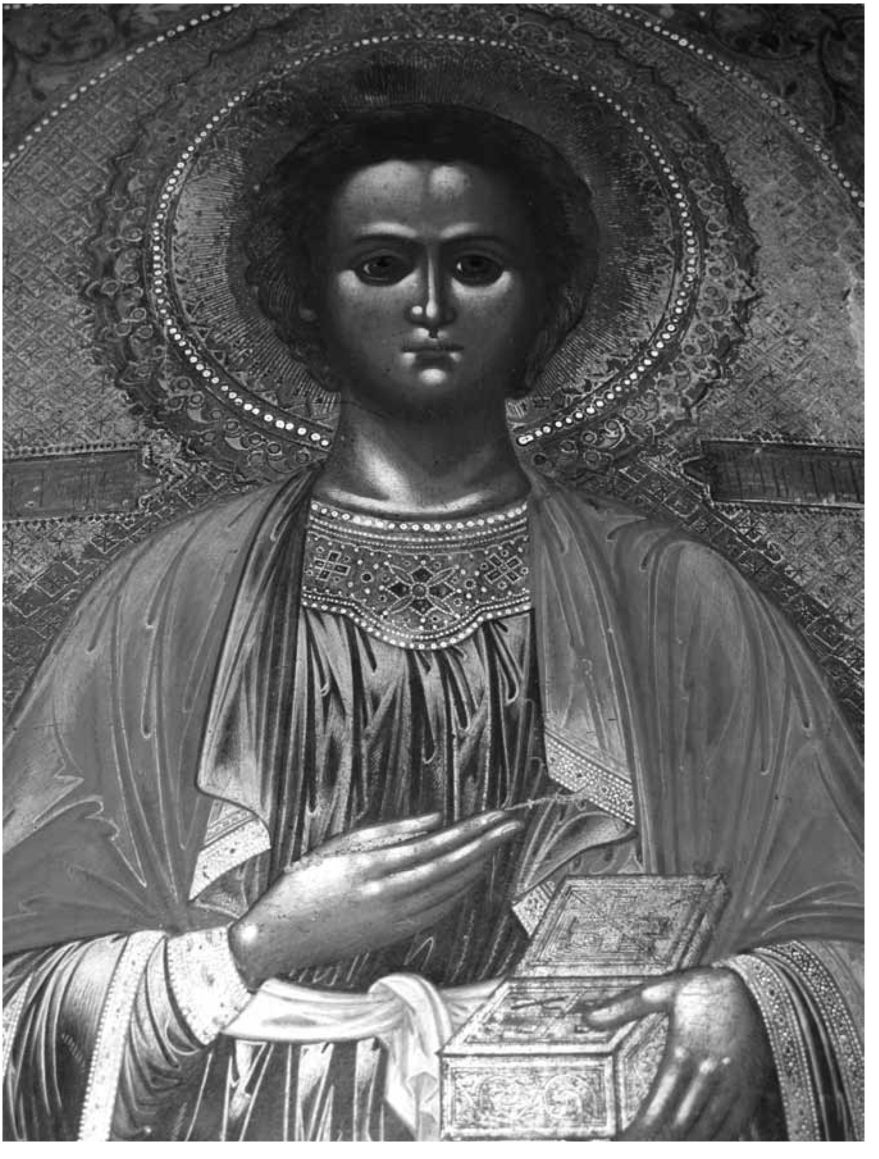
88 Potamianos, pp. 180–181, 246–251, 286–287.
89 Ibid., p. 246.
90 Ibid., pp. 37–40.
91 Ibid., p. 246.
92 Ibid., pp. 249, 251.
93 Symeon the New Theologian, *Hymnes III*, p. 212, Hymn 23:360–384.



12.3
Cathedral of the Ekatontapyliane, 4th century, Paros, Greece

the thickness of the night is here a metaphor. But it finds a natural analog in Orthodox churches when the morning or evening sun enters through doors and windows, to awaken illustrated (and living) saints. What the saint experienced spiritually in his cell, is reenacted in church space (see Figure 12.3).

When sunlight enters the church, it is hard to see in detail many of the frescos and mosaics placed on its apse, dome or upper walls. At night, the most visible areas are those closer to reflective surfaces, particularly if gilded in gold leaf or silver. Icons too are not fully visible. Difficulties in perceiving clearly color, line, texture, shape and other aesthetic



12.4
St. Panteleimon, early 19th century, St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery, Florence, Ariz., U.S.A.

properties under such conditions, make the experience of paintings quite similar to that of visions and dreams. This perhaps is the reason why the authenticating model of a painting would first appear in the painter's or patron's dream.[94]

It is conditions like these that most likely encouraged the creation of images that had their own ambient luminosity. They shone with an interior light and needed only the minimum presence of external illumination to

94 St. Maria the Younger instructs a painter in whose vision she appears to paint her "as you see me now." This and other examples are discussed in Kazhdan and Maguire, "Byzantine Hagiographical Texts."

become fully visible. In mosaics, a rich palette of colors (shades of yellow, amber, green, blue, brown, black etc.) applied on glass tesserae, and the use of cubes of select marble, gold and silver leaf glass, created lustrous, gleaning surfaces. The overall effect was one of depth and motion. Overlapping hues created a chromatic recession. The image formed by the mosaic moved from the surface to a deeper ground from where it would emerge time and again, as if it were actually forming its own appearance (see our discussion of a similar movement in the paintings of Rothko in Chapter 13).[95]

The undated Athonite icon of St. Panteleimon in Figure 12.4 is painted on a curved panel. Its most prevalent features are the vivid, contrasting colors and the luminous motifs in areas most associated with the saint's spiritual identity and miraculous attributes. These appear lit from inside, glowing with an integral, corporeal light. The icon's elaborate background surrounds the figure. Reminiscent of a field of flowers or jewels, it contrasts with its concentrated and pensive gaze. It resembles embroidery or a mosaic. Symeon's theophanies come to mind. The divine light irradiates Symeon's body with its "shimmering rays (*aktisi kataugazon*)." Here it shapes and permeates the Saint's face. When he is united with God, Symeon is filled with light (*photophoron*). He resembles an "oil lamp shining (*lampas eklampousa*)." So does the youthful face of the icon. It is the same aesthetic that led Digenes and Comnena to see in the sensuous existence of their loved ones the presence of an ideal and timeless life. The icon is alive. It exists in a world steeped in color and light. Delightful and solemn, it brings theophany and holiness to the senses. It is an example in art of the synergy of natural and divine light. The Saint is present as an inextricably aesthetic and spiritual being.

[95] The tessarae in the head of the Virgin from the *Deesis* mosaic panel in the Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, are arranged "in a pointillistic fashion to blend colours at a distance." James, *Light and Colour*, plate 15.

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13

The Theophanic Icon

Theophany is the natural and supernatural fruition of the ascetic life. The ascetics who strive to see God live simultaneously on the margins and center of the Church. They are often at odds with monastic and ecclesiastical authorities only to emerge in later years as exemplary persons or saints (e.g., the Holy Fools of Russia).[1] Exemplary icons have a similar relationship to artistic conventions. They reflect and transcend them at the same time. Like the ascetic, they speak from a deeper ground and beyond the confines of what at their time is understood as traditional or normative. They embody ascetic modalities like humility, austerity and silence. They hide their art in profound simplicity. Symeon's charismatic spirituality challenged Church authorities for two centuries after his death.[2] His idiosyncratic, daring and deeply personal poetry remains unmatched in Orthodox hymnography. The icons of Theophanes (Feofan) the Greek (c. 1330–c. 1410) are to this day unique and mysterious. They seem projected and incorporated on walls and panels from an invisible source. They appear to form spontaneously in light and pigment, a quality that the work of his student St. Andrei Rublev (c. 1360/70–c. 1430) simulates but never captures with the same spontaneity and simplicity.

The purification of the passions that precedes the divine vision implies for the image a similar emptying, a simultaneously kenotic and plerotic aesthetic. Implicit is a movement toward the dissolution and augmentation of form, toward contraction and expansion consistent with the inexhaustible plenitude and withdrawal of the divine presence. I have selected four icons which display these qualities and engage the aesthetic object in acts of self-realization, bringing it to a state of *enargic* subsistence—what ascesis and divine grace bring to beings in Maximian ontology. They include a fresco, *The Holy Trinity (Hospitality of Abraham)* in the Cathedral of Transfiguration on Ilyina Street, Novgorod (c. 1374) by Theophanes the Greek (Color Plate

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1 Lossky, *The Mystical Theology*, pp. 19–20. Irina Shalina, "St. Andrew the Holy Fool with Scenes from His Life," in Roderick Grierson (ed.), *Gates of Mystery: The Art of Holy Russia* (Fort Worth, 1992), pp. 246–249.

2 Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses*, vol. 3, pp. 175–184.

1; Figure 13.1), and three panel icons: *Christ Pantocrator* (Athens Byzantine Museum, fourteenth century) (Color Plate 6; Figure 13.2), *The Savior* (c. 1394, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow) by Andrei Rublev (Color Plate 4; Figure 13.3), and *The Apostle Thomas* (mid. fourteenth century, Holy Metropolis of Thessaloniki, Greece) (Color Plate 7; Figure 13.4).

But before we turn to these works, it is necessary to clarify further the relationship between theophany and art. The *visio dei* in Orthodoxy is a discernible, empirical reality.[3] As we saw in Maximus, the divine light inhabits beings; it is in that regard incarnate. In deification, the senses open to creation and beings emerge as perfected participants in an unfolding theophany, actively and charismatically immersed (*photistiken charin*) in the life of the divine word.[4] Christ dwells in glory and holiness, "in the fullness of the deity (*pleroma theotetos*)," inside the ascetic who consumes him every day and moment of his life.[5] But what is consumed consumes and envelops. *Theosis* is at once Eucharist and Baptism, Transfiguration and Passion. To explain this plenitude, Maximus uses the image of subterranean waters, springing from an everliving Christ who is "the source of life" (*pegen zoes*) in order to underscore this interior plenitude.[6] Symeon's ideas of the body as a full participant in deification and of divine illumination as an intimate encounter with Christ have a Maximian basis.[7] According to Alfeyev, Symeon brings Maximus' view of the deification of the entire person to its natural, anthropological conclusion.[8]

Theophany is ontophany and anthropophany. What the ascetic sees can be seen by others whose senses have been restored—those who like the disciples on Mount Tabor have witnessed her deification. Symeon made poetry of his encounters with uncreated light.[9] His hymns show a life consumed by the desire to see the divine light. His inability to explain (*eipein*) everything that he experiences only intensifies the need to put it in words, a task that is never completely mastered. His verse bears witness to truths that he cannot explain. The uncreated light is known directly and through its redemptive interventions (*ergo*). But it is never fully objectified. Language cannot contain it. It exists in words and beyond them. The poet discovers his verse (and voice) as he searches for God but he also loses it the moment that the right words are found. Theophany is a cause for silence and for new forms of speech. Parallels with the iconography of holy (and in secular literature ideal) persons are hard to miss. Pairs like visible invisibility, formless form, immeasurable measure

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3 Golytzin, "Christian Mysticism over Two Millennia."

4 PG90:1133D, 1140C, 1160CD.

5 PG90:1133D.

6 PG90:1133D, 1344A.

7 According to Symeon, one cannot delve into matters of theology without first having known God. Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses*, vol. 3, pp. 31–35. Alfeyev, pp. 38–42.

8 Alfeyev, pp. 266–268.

9 Lossky calls Symeon "the singer of union with God." Lossky, *The Mystical Theology*, p. 9.

etc. are everywhere in Symeon's verse.[10] They are not only rhetorical tropes. They are also the liminal forms of a reality that language cannot contain.

This is an aesthetic in which paradox defines and transcends form. We have seen it in the flushing pinks and reds of human faces animated and yet asleep, tangible and yet ideal (e.g., Digenes' wife), or of divine and holy persons coming alive on the surface of motionless walls (e.g., the Theotokos of the Hagia Sophia apse). To capture and express life, painting and poetry must break the forms that make them possible. By establishing dissonances through recognizable patterns and forms, they can bring to their silent subjects the semblance of life. Paintings that have *enargeia* set themselves in a motion that they contain but which at the same time contains them and defines their being. We may think of them as particulars that embody and realize the lives of universals.

In the twelfth-century mosaic of the *Great Deesis* (Hagia Sophia) that we discussed earlier (Chapter 3), Christ appears detached and tender, austere and gentle, subtle in his divinity and robust in his humanity. Tensions created by this type of juxtaposition point beyond an art of representation and toward an art of living presence. In Symeon's verse, the reader encounters a reality that is unfolding in the very act of reading and listening. She reads and hears the ineffable—the theme is present in all of Symeon's hymns. Words reveal and conceal. Elliptical phrases and opposites come together, as if to suspend and affirm logic. The voice that speaks in Symeon's hymns craves for communication and expression. But its silence is also unmistakably there.

These observations help frame our inquiry, but they are not specific enough. To speak of a theophanic icon in the fullest sense of the word, we must know what theophany looks like. Orthodox tradition tells us that in deification the body is visibly transfigured. The penultimate Eucharist, theophany sanctifies the full person, spiritual and physical. In the fourteenth century, this understanding of divine Presence was the subject of a bitter controversy that pitted Byzantine humanists against Palamas and other theologians who were concerned about the incursions of reason and philosophy in religion and the increasing sympathy with which Thomism and scholastic thought were viewed in official circles.[11] Theophany and the doctrine of the Divine Energies on which it was based is still not a settled issue between Orthodox and Catholic theologians.[12] We can only consider the matter briefly as our topic dictates.

In *The Triads (In Defense of the Holy Hesychasts)*, Palamas answered his critics by arguing for the hypostatic character of the divine vision and the deification of the body.[13] He knew Symeon's work well: "In his Christocentrism, his

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10 Symeon the New Theologian, *Hymnes III*, pp. 158–160 (50:30–55).

11 Runciman, p. 101.

12 Williams, pp. 4–5.

13 Meyendorff, *The Byzantine Legacy*, p. 168. Palamas' main opponent was Barlaam of Calabria (c. 1290–1348) whose supporters included the theologian Gregory Akindynos (c. 1300–1348). Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, pp. 27, 42–62, 139–146, 187.

Eucharistic spirituality and his theology concerning the light, Palamas certainly owes much to that great mystic of the eleventh century, to whom however he scarcely refers."[14] The two were also connected through an eleventh-century tract on the Jesus Prayer.[15] The ancient prayer now included the inhaling and exhaling invocation of the name of Jesus. The aim was to concentrate the intellect in the heart, the seat of spiritual life. The tract was initially attributed to Symeon, because of similarities to his writings on the same subject. Its influence is evident in *The Triads*.

For Palamas, theophany is the consummate Christian experience and the justification of the ascetic life. The divine light is hypostatic. It is an object or reality of some kind: "one sees, not in a negative way—for one sees something (*ora gar ti*)—but in a manner superior to negation (*apophasis*)."[16] By "negation" Palamas means the removal from the intellect of any cognitive form or figure and the cessation of all mental activities (*noeras energeias*).[17] This "something" is indeed some thing. God is a reality, a living actuality (as *energeia*). The divine light is his presence. It operates internally, affecting the senses, and externally, affecting sensory objects: "contemplation (*theoria*) … is not simply abstraction (*aphairesis*) and negation (*apophasis*).[18] It is a union (*enosis*) and a divinization (*ektheosis*) which occurs by the grace of God, after the stripping away of everything from here below which imprints itself on the mind, or rather after the cessation (*apopausis*) of all intellectual activity."[19] It is a known unknown.

In divinization, senses and intellect coincide. This is evident in the claim that those who see the divine light do not pretend to "know … what it is (*ti de estin ouk eidenai*)" that they are seeing, but know only *that* they are "seeing (*orosin*)" an "immaterial brilliance" (*aylon ellampsin*).[20] The distinction between "knowing" and "seeing" indicates that in this experience the senses perceive without reflection and ratiocination. Perception does not trigger thought. It contains it. Thought saturates perception. Objects do not stand out as such in the particularity assigned to them by cognition even though they remain distinct in their forms. Luminosity permeates one's field of vision but is not accompanied by an attachment to objects. Light exists in and through things. It does not stand outside to illuminate them. The two co-inhere in a state of ontic rest and plenitude.

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14 Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, p. 155.

15 Meyendorff considers comparisons to the Muslim *dhikr*. Ibid., pp. 139–140. The tract's title is "Method of Sacred Prayer and Attentiveness." Instructions on meditative positions were given by Symeon in some of his writings and are repeated in the Method. See also Alfeyev, pp. 276–277.

16 *The Triads*, I.iii.4. The English translation, unless otherwise indicated, is from Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, ed. John Meyendorff, trans. Nicholas Gendle (New York, 1983). Greek text from *Gregoire Palamas, Defense de saints hesychastes: Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes*, ed. John Meyendorff (2 vols, Louvain, 1959).

17 I.iii.18.

18 I.iii.17.

19 Ibid.

20 II.iii.9.

Like Symeon, Palamas insists on the immanence of the divine vision. At the same time, the encounter with God defies explanation. Thought lapses into paradox: the light is "invisibly visible," "unknowingly knowable" (*oromenen aoratos*, *nooumenen agnostos*), the radiance of "an invisible (*aphanous*) glory" which is nevertheless "observed (*epopteuontes*)" by the saints—this last quotation is from Maximus who is frequently quoted in the *Triads*.[21] Yet theophany brings immediate certainty. The divine light is called a "sight (*thea*)" that is "true (*alethe*)" and not a "semblance or analogy (*eikotos*)."[22] It is not a "symbol (*sumbolon*)" or "illusion (*phasma*)."[23] To see it, is to see God's active presence in the world. In theophany the mediating activity of the intellect ceases. This is not a space for dialectic.

His opponents had argued otherwise, contending that the light seen by the three disciples in the Transfiguration was "sensible, visible through the medium of the air, appearing to the amazement of all and then at once disappearing. One calls it divinity because it is a symbol of divinity."[24] For Palamas it was beneath God to appear through something other than his own energies. Theophany cannot hide behind a creature, "a sensible light … whose nature is entirely foreign (*physin allotriotaten*) to God." His reasoning was simple: "a drawing of a man (*gegrammenos*) is not humanity, nor is the symbol of an angel the nature of an angel."[25] God is present as he is, in his unlimited actuality, not through a sign or semblance. He *is* the Taboric light; he does not appear through it: "the light was not a simulacrum of divinity, but truly the light of the true divinity, not only the divinity of the Son but that of the Father and the Spirit too."[26] Theophany is exactly what the word means: the appearance or revelation of God in the world.

For Palamas, nature is open to divine activity because that activity is the *logos* present in all creatures. By contrast a theology that claims God's withdrawal into similitude empties beings of their inherent divinity and leads them to an existence without grace. Theophany is therefore a reality to which all beings are attuned. Their very being anticipates it. When the divine light enters the atmosphere, it is fully received by it because it is in its nature to do so. Thus, it is not to an intrinsically alien world that God appears but to a world that has alienated itself from him and has therefore violated its own nature. To be truly one's nature is to participate in divine being. To explain this idea, Palamas borrows the Areopagite notion of "spiritual sensation (*pneumatiken aisthesin*)" that is, sensation infused with the Holy Spirit. He describes it in terms of "participation (*methexis*)," "reception (*lepsis*)" and "divinization (*ektheosis*)."[27]

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21 I.iii.20; II.iii.8.

22 II.iii.16, 35. Meyendorff, *The Byzantine Legacy*, p. 182.

23 I.iii.5, 18; II.iii.8, 20.

24 III.i.11. Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, p. 187. For Barlaam the light of the Transfiguration was an optical phenomenon and could only signify God.

25 III.i.11.

26 Ibid. III.i.12.

27 I.iii.18, 21.

"*Methexis*" is dynamic. Those who sense spiritually do so because their senses have come alive in grace and are looking at the world with new eyes. "*Ektheosis*" implies divinization from within: one becomes a God by reaching out for God. True theology begins from that movement. In the beginning one cannot see: "that light is not sensible (*aistheton*), even though the Apostles were deemed worthy to see it with their very own eyes, but through another, not sensible (*aesthetike*) power."[28] Later, one sees but cannot describe the sight "as it was seen (*ouk hos horomenon*)."[29] The senses now open to the very ground of their existence and so does the intellect: "he does not know by what organ he sees this light"—thus Paul "did not know whether it was his intellect or his body which saw" (2 Cor. 12:2).[30] There are no originating causes or agents because discursive thought has ceased to operate: "the Spirit through whom he sees is untraceable (*anexichniaston*)."[31] In theophany, nothing moves because everything is in motion. A thing's act of being itself becomes evident.

With stillness comes clarity: "Such a one does not see by sense perception (*aisthesei*), but his vision is as clear as or clearer than that by which the sight clearly perceives sensibilia (*aistheta*)."[32] Brilliance is not confined to objects or their enframing space but seems to expand beyond them (*peras lamprotetos*).[33] Palamas compares it to sunshine (*en hemera lamponti phosphoro*) that shows no degree of fluctuation or change: "What then shall we say of that light which admits neither movement (*parallage*) nor shadow of change (*tropes aposkiasma*) which is the splendor (*apagausma*) of deified flesh, flesh which enriches and communicates the glory of the divinity?"[34]

As in Symeon, illumination takes two forms. In the first, it precedes union and appears suddenly in the form of a flash of light (*epilampsin*). In the second, it coincides with union and appears as a "perpetual vision of light (*diarkes photos thea*)."[35] How Palamas explains this notion is of particular interest. Objects are typically positioned in our visual field according to proximity, distance, sequence and succession. The further away they stand, the less visible they are and the more abstract. In theophany this order is inverted: "even things far off are accessible to the eyes, and the future is shown as already existing (*os onta deiknytai*)."[36]

The most tangible instance of theophany is in the saint. The "deified (*theourgesan*)" bodies of the saints can be seen with "bodily eyes (*somatikois opthalmois*)" transformed (*metharmosamenon*) and filled with a "radiant light (*lamprotetos*)."[37] They show no evidence of aging, suffering or rigor mortis (a

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28 I.iii.28.
29 I.iii.18.
30 I.iii.21.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 I.iii.22.
34 II.iii.18.
35 II.iii.45.
36 Ibid.
37 II.iii.9, 20.

phenomenon still reported on Mount Athos). Luminous in their appearance, they often emit a fragrant scent.[38] Like icons, their bodies when deceased may bleed myrrh. The sanctified body participates in the divine energies—even in death. Palamas cites St. Gregory the Theologian according to whom the divine splendor is contained within created nature (*physei choreithei*).[39] In theophany, nature cooperates with God, in a joint act of creation. He also quotes St. John Climacus (c. 525–606): "One is a hesychast who hastens to confine the incorporeal in the corporeal (*asomaton en somati*)."[40] Asceticism is the struggle to return the body to this condition, as Climacus does not tire of repeating in *The Ladder*. In a beautiful passage, he calls his body: "my friend," "the one that by nature I have grown to love … to whom I am eternally bound … the one who will rise with me (*syn emoi anistamenon*)."[41] The body is to be rediscovered and loved according to its sanctity. Its mystery and that of the soul are inextricably bound: "What is the mystery that surrounds me? How am I to explain the blending of my body and soul?"[42]

Faithful to the Patristic tradition and especially Maximus, Palamas ties *theosis* to the Incarnation. Asceticism (hesychasm) is the gratuitous conformation of matter to Christ. In Christ, matter finds its true form and life (*zoes eidos*). The ascetic participates in the mystery of the Incarnation through the transformation of his own body: "For if the hesychast does not circumscribe the mind in his body, how can he make to enter himself the One who has clothed himself in the body, and who thus penetrates all organized matter, insofar as He is its natural form?"[43] Thus the body is rediscovered and reintegrated in divine life. Deification is actually the restoration of the ascetic's full humanity. The change is perceptible. It affects all aspects of one's existence.

What we can conclude from this brief examination is tentative and by no means precise. In the divine vision, light appears diffused rather than concentrated. According to Palamas, theophany de-materializes objects and makes them transparent. When in this condition things do not cast shadows. The permeating light creates an open and dynamic visual field. Objects are seen through each other and on an equal scale—perhaps without the usual divisions of foreground and background that order our perception of

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[38] The deified person creates an "environment" of sanctity, affecting not only the garments, sandals etc. that come in contact with the body but everything that surrounds it and is projected from it (e.g., according to Chrysostom, the shadows it casts). Chryssavgis, p. 63.

[39] II.iii.9.

[40] I.ii.6. PG88:1097B; the full sentence reads: "he is a hesychast who strives to confine the incorporeal in the corporeal, a true paradox (*to paradoxon*)." For a discussion of John's conception of the body and its relationship to the Incarnation, see Chryssavgis, pp. 53–61.

[41] PG88:901CD–904A. The translation is mine. See also Damianos, "The Icon as a Ladder of Divine Ascent in Form and Color."

[42] PG88:901CD–904A.

[43] Ibid. Climacus makes a similar point: "Inasmuch as the Lord is incorruptible and incorporeal, so too does He rejoice in the purity and incorruptibility of our body." Chryssavgis, p. 57. PG88:888B.

things. Vision becomes panoramic, and perspectives multiply. Tensions that usually result from the arrangement of objects in space are eliminated. The relationships between solids and voids that define space and help orientate perception are suspended. Simple, ethereal and evanescent forms appear as integral expressions of the luminous field that envelops them. They exist in a stasis that intensifies their presence and being and takes its intensity from an ambient and pervasive light. Lossky's "margin of silence," the mystical ground from where tradition generates new forms and realities and in which it envelops (obscures) their origins, comes to mind.[44]

In theophany all mental activity ceases. Thought is totally absorbed in the act of seeing. It is thoroughly visualized. Rather than posit objects, vision now exists in total synergy with them. Even illumination eliminates contrasts. Things have an inner luminance or brilliance that makes them appear at once physical and immaterial, opaque and yet diaphanous, solid and still ethereal. But light also materializes in form or as form, making its energic nature visible. Thus things exist dynamically, as phenomena of their own subsistence, immersed in a light that they possess and which possesses them. Illumination is a state of being. Digenes' glassy palace and the luminous, mirror-like wings of Theophanes' angels, in which their stillness and flight are caught forever, are an example. Things seen in their basic structures or geometry, transparent like illuminated transparencies, are not just that. They are also fully themselves, free of their reified existence. We cannot know exactly what happens to color under these conditions. But we know that it cannot be a superficial veneer or a mere quality of things. It must exist in an ontophanic modality. We shall see later how Modernism's experiments with color and form become relevant to the experience of color suggested by theophany.

What happens to light and beings in theophany recalls the movement that gives us *enargeia*. In *enargeia* an interior (internalized) motion is present in the image that accounts for its vividness. All instances of *enargeia* are epiphanic but not all are theophanic. In the encaustic painting of Eutyches, illumination is essential to form but it is not where form as such materializes (or arises). By contrast, the icons examined in this chapter, bring light to a state of corporeal existence (or expression) while imparting on it the deep expressivity of personhood, the hypostatic expression present in the incarnating and incarnate *Logos*.

If we consider two of these images in their historical context, Rublev's *The Savior* and Theophanes' *The Holy Trinity*, it will become apparent that they have hesychasm as their spiritual and aesthetic basis. The influence of Palamite theology on fourteenth-century iconography in Russia is indisputable. The key figure linking Symeon, Palamas and Rublev is St. Sergius of Radonezh (1314–1392), a mystic and monastic reformer. Rublev took his vows under the Abbot and founder of Troitsky (presently St. Sergius-Trinity) Monastery,

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44 Lossky, *In the Image*, p. 160.

St. Nikon of Radonezh (1355–1427), successor and disciple of Sergius.[45] Sergius was active in the beginning of a period of great monastic revival which coincided with the translation of Symeon's writings in Slavonic and the beginning of his remarkable influence on Russian monastic and lay spirituality.[46] Sergius' familiarity with Byzantine hesychastic circles is confirmed by his contacts with one of hesychasm's leading figures, the Patriarch of Constantinople Philotheos Kokkinos (c. 1300–1379) who was a friend and disciple of Palamas and the compiler of the *Haghioritic Tome*, an Athonite tract on hesychasm.[47]

Sergius' experiences of uncreated light and fire resemble Symeon's. Epiphanius the Wise, his first biographer (who is also the source for the little information we have for Theophanes), reports a vision of light which Sergius had during one of his vigils. Responding to a voice calling him by name, Sergius opened the window of his cell whereupon "a great light appeared from heaven and drove away all darkness of the night, and the night was illuminated by this light which excelled by its brightness the light of day."[48] The description could be taken from any number of Symeon's hymns. In another vision, as Sergius was officiating, a disciple known for his purity "saw a fire moving over the Table of Oblation, illuminating the altar and encircling the Holy Gifts. And when the saint was about to partake of Holy Communion, the divine fire rolled itself up like a shroud and entered the holy chalice."[49]

Symeon was especially popular among Sergius' disciples at Troitsky, where some of the earliest manuscripts of his hymns have been preserved. He was revered by later monastic groups, like the Non-Possessors led by Nil of Sora (c. 1433–1508), who also emphasized the importance of poverty, asceticism and unceasing prayer in Christian life.[50] Known mainly through his hymns, he remained one of the most popular Byzantine authors in Russia, equal in status to Palamas and the early Fathers of the Church. The intimate nature of his verse, its lyrical intensity, and love of imagery and paradox, led Russian iconography to reciprocate with stunning visual equivalents. The great icon of *The Holy Trinity* (consistently attributed to Rublev)

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[45] Gabriel Bunge, *The Rublev Trinity, The Icon of the Trinity by the Monk-Painter Andrei Rublev*, trans. Andrew Louth (Crestwood, 2007), pp. 59, 69.

[46] Alfeyev, pp. 278–279. John Meyendorff, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia* (New York, 1981), pp. 132–136.

[47] Meyendorff, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia*, pp. 132–136. Lossky, *In the Image*, p. 50. In a homily on the Dormition of the Virgin Mary, written while he was Abbot of the Great Lavra Monastery at Mount Athos, Kokkinos presents her as the exemplary hesychast. Her intellect filled with divine light. She imparts the mysteries of spiritual life to those of pure heart. Philotheos Kokkinos, *He Theotokos: Homilia eis ten Koimesin tes Hyperaghias Despoines Hemon Theotokou* (Homily on the Dormition of Our All-Holy Lady the Theotokos) (Athens, 2007), pp. 28–31, 76–79.

[48] Bunge, p. 66.

[49] Ibid., pp. 66–67.

[50] A rival group, the Possessors, sought a more moderate and worldly life. Alfeyev, pp. 279–280.

was commissioned by Nikon to commemorate his spiritual father.[51] Rublev painted the Church of the Holy Trinity at St. Sergius-Trinity that was damaged by the Tatar invaders and rebuilt by Nikon in 1422.[52]

Rublev is believed to have studied and worked with Theophanes, the painter who dominated Russian iconography in the latter part of the fourteenth century. Large numbers of Greek artists from Constantinople and other parts of the empire had come to Russia as early as the first half of the eleventh century.[53] The Cathedral of St. Sophia in Kiev is one place where their work survives. But the catalyst was Palamite theology. According to Olga Popova, the triumph of hesychasm in 1351 had the most profound effect on Russian art, one that lasted well into the end of the sixteenth century: "Art could now absorb the intellectual currents of the age, its fascination with the vision of God and the operation of divine energies as light. Painting could be spiritualized to an even greater degree."[54]

Popova identifies Sergius (and thus Symeon) as the seminal figure in the iconographic developments of that period and lists numerous icons which reflect the hesychastic spirituality that he and his disciples embraced.[55] Characterized by "flowing silhouettes, soft tones, simplified linear structures, smooth blending of color on the faces, and an overall harmony," these icons are "a direct and literal response to the example of his life and teaching."[56] She singles out Rublev as only second to Theophanes and calls his art "the embodiment of the hesychast prayer of the heart … this imagery is accessible only to a few seers of the Divine Light, the hesychasts, among whom his biography suggests St. Sergei should be numbered."[57] Extant church icons, painted throughout the fifteenth century, from Moscow, Dmitrov, Suzdal and other locations are characterized "by a festive solemnity … style has become delicate and fragile, and all forms are incorporeal … the smooth modeling of the faces is refined and almost transparent, which removes the pictorial surface from any sensual association."[58]

Recollections of Rublev and his fellow monk and iconographer Daniil by Trinity-Sergei's abbot Spiridon (1478), recorded in a chronicle of the period, have an obvious hagiographic character as they impart on the painters the

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51 The validity of this attribution has been questioned. Beljaev, "Andrej Rublev: The Invention of a Biography."

52 Bunge, pp. 69–70.

53 Olga Popova, "Medieval Russian Painting and Byzantium," in Grierson, *Gates of Mystery*, pp. 45–59. On speculation about Theophanes' departure for Russia, see Meyendorff, *Byzantium*, p. 141.

54 Popova, "Medieval Russian Painting and Byzantium," p. 55.

55 This is also the opinion of Meyendorff: "Not only is there no incompatibility between the art of Theophanes and Rublev, on the one side, and Hesychasm, on the other, but clearly, artists and monks, belonged to the same milieu." Meyendorff, *Byzantium*, pp. 143–144.

56 Popova, "Medieval Russian Painting and Byzantium," p. 57.

57 Ibid., p. 58.

58 Ibid.

discarnate contemplation of angels. But they also function as a mirror to his iconography where Spiridon can now envisage the painter coming alive and gazing at beings that are at once aesthetic and divine:

> … they had such virtues and were so eager for fasting and the monastic way of life, and participated so much in divine grace and were so advanced in divine love, that they never had any care for things earthly, but always raised their minds and their thoughts on high to the immaterial and divine light, while their physical eyes were continually raised to pictures of the Lord, and his all-pure Mother and all the Saints, painted with material colours. So even on the Feast Day of the radiant Resurrection of Christ, they sat on chairs before the divine and all-pure icons and looked continually at them, whence they were filled with divine joy and radiance.[59]

The reference to color in a context that emphasizes purity, radiance and immateriality is consistent with the descriptions of exemplary Byzantine icons and mosaics in *ekphraseis* and epigrams. The painters' contemplation of icons and their divine subjects is intense and is presented here as theophany in art. The painted figures radiate a joyful light that suggests the delicacy and fragility of their form and the presence of divine grace. It is as if art has absorbed theophany and stands now in lieu of the *visio dei*. The aesthetic object is present but its materiality is transcended the moment it is perceived. Art brings theophany to the senses and is itself transfigured in the process. The image of the two iconographers lost in contemplation on the day of the Feast of the Resurrection suggests continuities between liturgy, iconography and theophany which this Russian *ekphrasis* assumes.

Epiphanius, a disciple of Sergius and his biographer, presents a similar account of his friend Theophanes at work, in a letter written in 1415.[60] The Greek painter has no use for "existing models" and paints instead from "his inner spirit" which "encompassed distant and intellectual realities while his spiritual eyes contemplated spiritual beauty."[61] Theophanes here paints spiritual realities without the mediation of art—which is why no models need to be placed before him. The intimation of an *acheiropoietos* moment where the image is received in the artist's inner vision—like an apparition—instead of materializing slowly on a panel, is an intriguing notion. It is also a testament to (or perhaps a justification for) his daring originality. On the other hand, we must admit that Theophanes' iconography, in particular his frescos, corroborate Epiphanius' account.

The Holy Trinity is part of a cycle of frescos that established Theophanes' reputation in Russia as an eccentric artist-philosopher who painted traditional

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59 Bunge, p. 71.

60 For a detailed discussion of this letter and its validity as a description of Theophanes' style see Robin Cormack, "O Kallitechnes sten Konstantinoupole: Arithmoi, Koinonike These, Zetemata Apodoses" (The Constantinopolitan Artist: Numbers, Social Position, Matters of Attribution), trans. Andreas Pappas in Vasilake, *To Portraito*, pp. 67–71.

61 Meyendorff, *Byzantium*, p. 143.



13.1
Theophanes the Greek, *The Holy Trinity (Hospitality of Abraham)*, c. 1374, Cathedral of Transfiguration, Ilyina Street, Novgorod, Russia

iconographic themes with an uncharacteristic fluency and novelty.[62] Figure 13.1 (see also Color Plate 2) is a detail from this work that does not include the figure of Sarah in the lower right sight of the composition.[63] The figure of Abraham and other parts of the fresco have been destroyed.

The two-tone composition, in shades of white and brown, recalls a photographic negative. The three main figures are positioned in an isosceles triangle and framed by their open wings and energetic haloes. They sit comfortably around a table fully aware of what is placed in front of them and eager to share it. Tonality is intense in those areas where red washes are most visible. Highlights are in white outlined over brown, orange and red and seem drawn in rapid strokes as if painted in a hurry in order to catch rapidly flashing light or an unfolding action. They help model the figures' arms, hands, faces, staffs and wings and the contents of the hemicyclic plane at the center that resembles a table or built structure. The white tunics and himatia

[62] According to Meyendorff, Theophanes' work shows that hesychasm is compatible with humanism. Ibid., pp. 141–142. Some Theophanes icons reproduced in Viktor Nikitich Lazarev, *The Russian Icon: From Its Origins to the Sixteenth Century*, trans. Colette Joly Dees (Collegeville, 1997), pp. 255–265.

[63] The detail is reproduced from Bunge, p. 35.

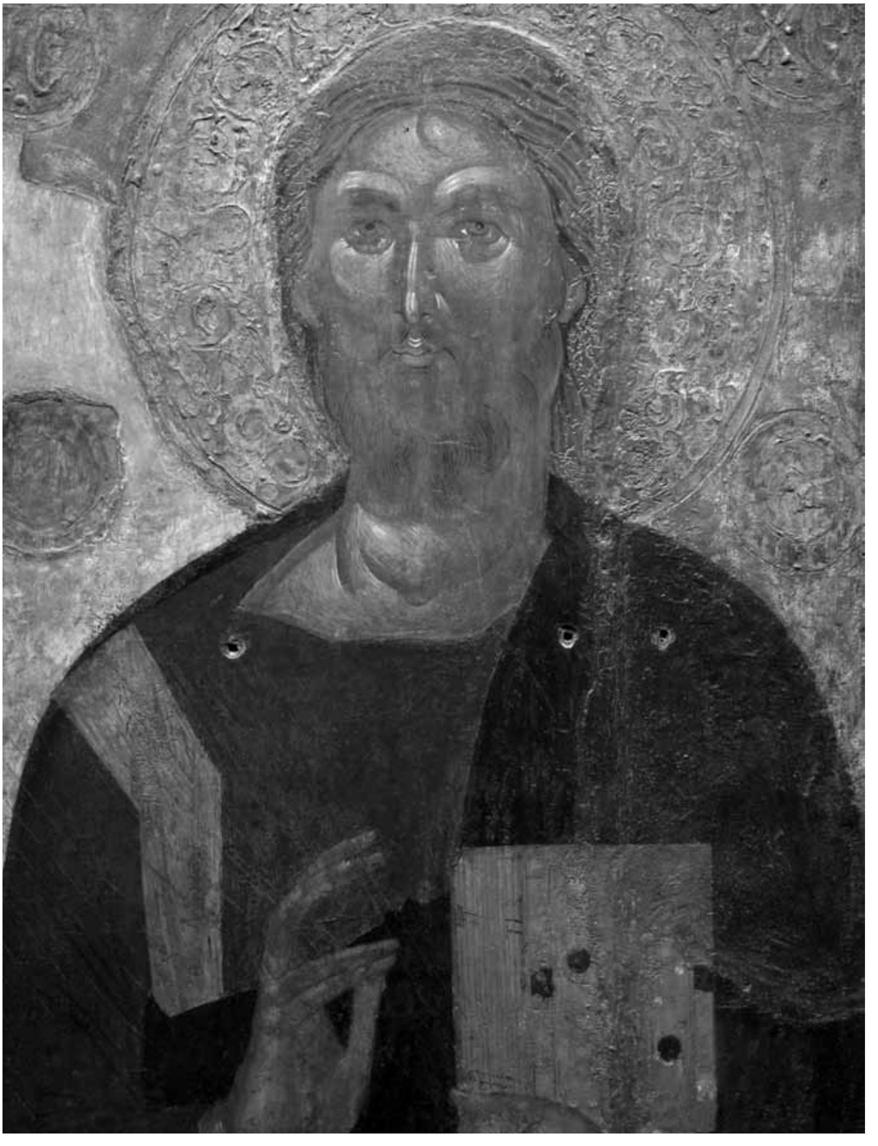
(of the angels in the center and left) blend and fade in the white background against which wings, haloes and the figures' red, brown, white and orange garments are taking shape. The effect is impressionistic.

With reserved gestures and expressions of keen awareness and anticipation, the angels appear as if they have just settled around the table. Like everything else in the icon, they are formed out of a combination of lighter and darker tones. There is a transparent quality and weightlessness to the entire composition that contrasts with the solid and robust bodies outlined by the voluminous, flowing hymatia (especially of the angel seated on the right). One gets the impression that the scene is unfolding before her very eyes, passing over the wall like a shadow or reflected likeness. Outlined in brown, with very fine white striations on the cheeks, chin, nose, neck and forehead, the angels' heads rest against brown haloes which have their own physical presence, suspended over them like shielding disks set in a circular motion or like straw hats in the summer sun. There is tension in their alert and intense gazes. The central figure's enveloping wings circle the table around its curved side creating a rhythmic movement of enclosure and openness. There is a sense of stillness or tentative rest that contrasts with the highly curved shape and dynamic contouring of his wings which give the impression of restlessness and impending flight.

The limited range of colors gives objects and structures a geometric and abstract quality. Their bodies are light, translucent and ethereal. Their postures and gestures are delicate and have an air of uncertainty. The image is warm and earthy, but also cold and distant. It has a high degree of abstraction as highlights define everything in sight. This imparts on the table (particularly the white blade of the knife lightly touched by the angel), on the figures' wings, hair and garments, and on their facial expressions and gestures, a stark, geometric simplicity. The icon and its subjects seem to materialize in light as they are being painted and the impression is created that figures and image can at any moment disappear or shift into another form and color. Theophanes may have painted the quintessential icon that so many Byzantine *ekphraseis* made their ideal. For us this means that an image can enter the realm of theophany aesthetically without the need of representation or symbolism by simply being itself. Two other icons allow us to think in the same direction (see Figures 13.2 [and Color Plate 6] and 13.3 [and Color Plate 4]).

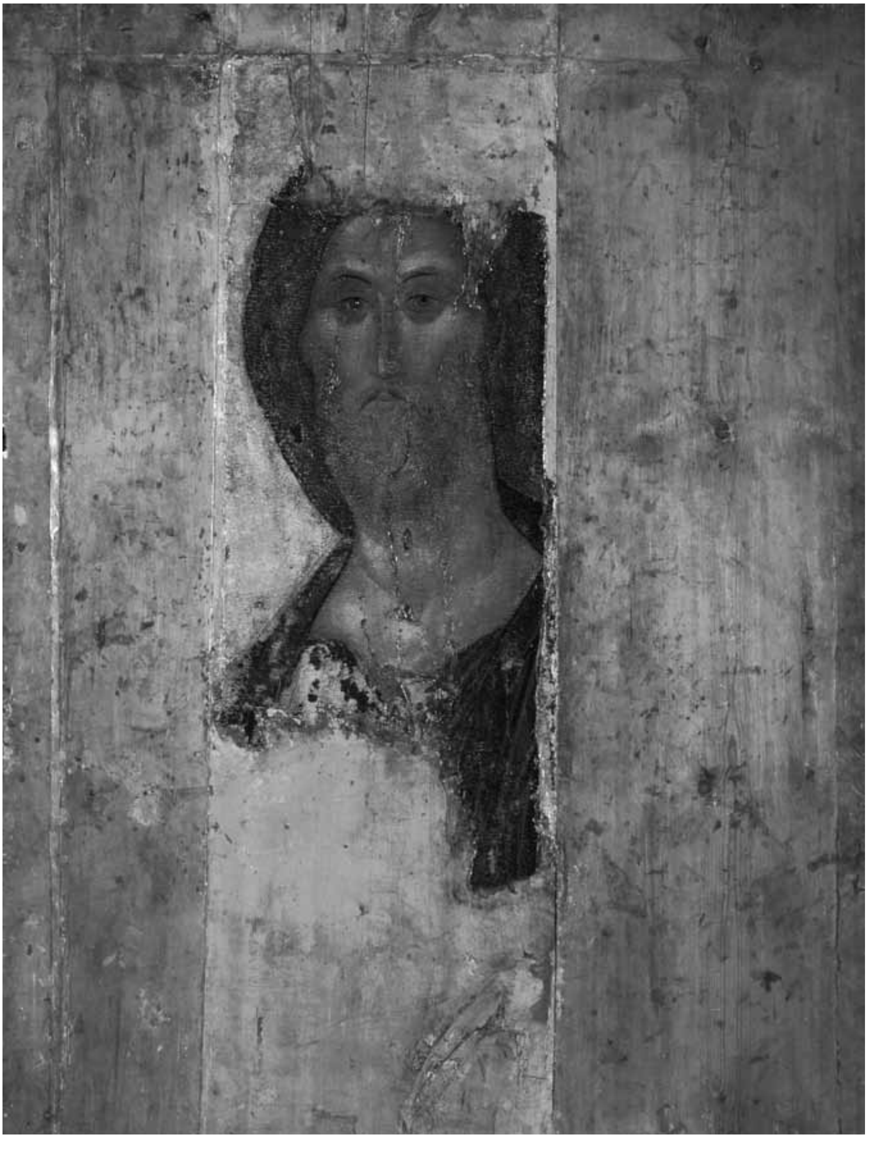
The two images are quite similar. In both, Christ has a radiant, expressive and eloquent face with refined and delicate features, and a quiet, reserved majesty.[64] In the Athens icon, his face is more articulated and robust and its contours suggest a fullness and depth that is absent from the Russian icon. Yet, light is an inimical, substantive aspect of figuration in both icons that defines

[64] A similar icon of Christ (from a *Great Deesis* group) is discussed in Euthymios Tsigaridas, "Christ *Pantocrator*, Vatopedi Monastery," in Athanasius A. Karakatsanis (ed.) *Treasures of Mount Athos* (Athens, 1997), pp. 83–84.



13.2 *Christ Pantocrator*, 14th century, Byzantine Museum, Athens, Greece

the two figures and brings them to a state of vivid and conscious presence. The Greek Christ has a physical intensity and pensiveness in his expression that is absent from Rublev's translucent and ethereal Savior. The Russian icon is rendered in soft tones whose sonorous quality and shimmering density bring a motioning, lyrical quality to his expression that is not evident in the Athens painting. In the forehead, cheeks and neck of the *Pantocrator* light is thoroughly corporealized and appears to swell from within, bringing to his face a sense of warmth and proximity if not intimacy to the viewer. By contrast, Rublev's Christ looks toward and beyond his viewers with a hushing and distancing silence.



13.3 Andrei Rublev, *The Savior*, c. 1394, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia

The pronounced highlights in the *Pantocrator*'s forehead and eyebrows recall the icon of St. Panteleimon that we discussed in the previous chapter in which the Saint's body is shown glowing like an oil lamp. But there is much less concentration of light here as if plastic unity matters less and what is important is to bring every plastic element to a state of transfigured subsistence. *The Savior* is modeled in soft, diffused highlights which reduce depth and bring to color an atmospheric, ethereal and irradiated quality that imparts on the figure an emanating presence.[65] Fine and precise lines

[65] Mikhail Alpatov, *Andrei Rublev* (Moscow, 1972), pp. 129–140. See also Daniel Kaiser and Gary Marker (eds.), *Reinterpreting Russian History* (London, 1997). Rublev's icons were

outline the face, eyes, eyebrows and delicate mustache as if inscribing a face on the irradiated flesh. Here painting itself participates in theophany.[66] The tender slightly motioning mouth, the blushing hues of the cheeks, and the figure's open, distant and encompassing gaze, create an expression of calm gentleness and quiet bliss.

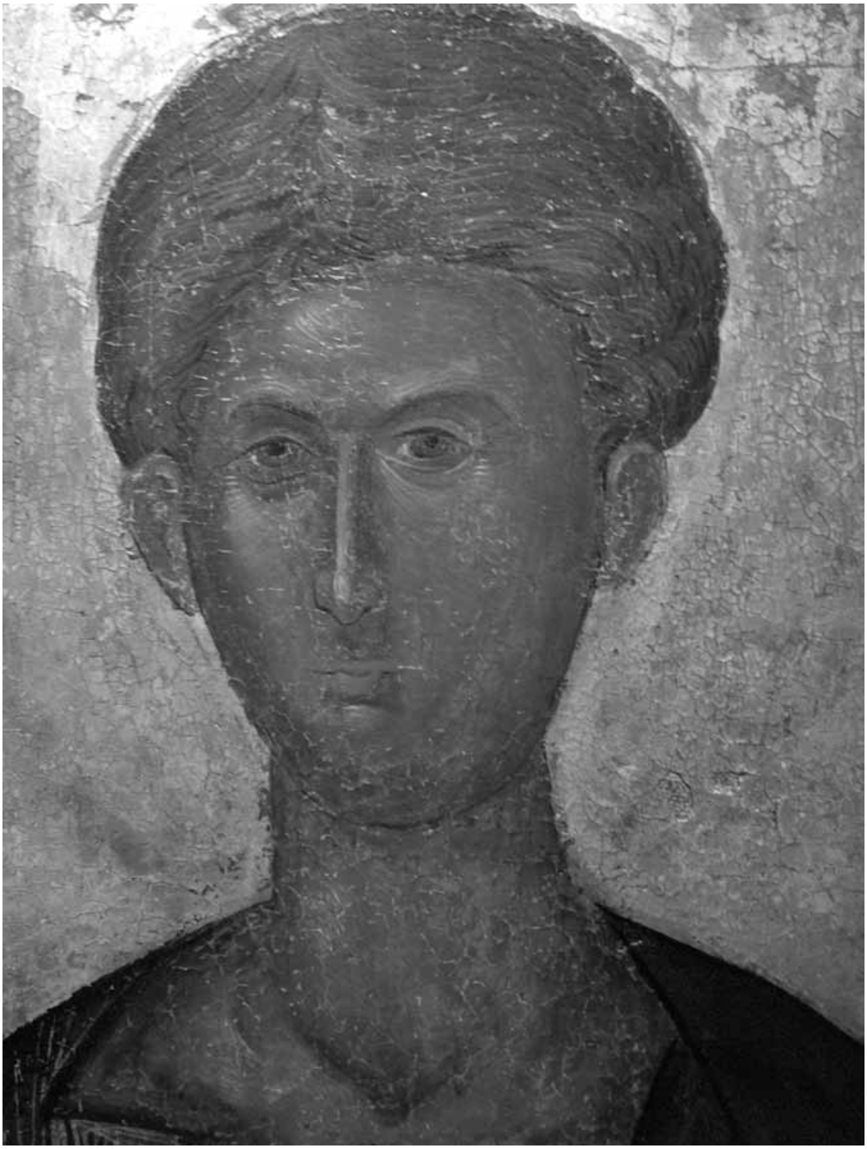
When seen side by side, the two figures appear to motion in opposite directions. The Athens icon occupies and dominates space while *The Savior* gives the impression of pausing or even restraining its own appearance. The *Pantocrator*'s expression is engaging, his gaze is arresting and firm. His is not a state of contemplative repose but one of penetrating and yet warm and tangible austerity. Contoured highlights in the neck, cheeks, nose and forehead saturate the figure with physical and mental (*noetic*) energy most visible perhaps in its distended neck. The asymmetrical positioning of the eyes makes vision a dominant quality of the face and lends the resonance of interior life to its physical features. By contrast, *The Savior* is all light, all color as if nothing is kept inside and what forms on the surface of the image is the full being present in one singular and inexhaustible apparition. His flushed cheeks carry a sense of intangible warmth and animation. The nearly transparent beard is consistent with an atmosphere of diffused but contained illumination. Light is faintly corporealized and emitted softly from the face, eyes, hair and skin. The overall effect is one of lightness and tranquil silence, presence and ineffability.

In the icon of St. Thomas (Figure 13.4; Color Plate 7), the youthful figure resonates with the gold field that surrounds it and their co-existence has a sonorous and yet quiet quality. Its complexion recalls the warm, lustrous and polished appearance of hammered copper. The refined highlights, the terse but expressive lines that outline the eyebrows, nose and lips and the pensive, mature and resolute gaze impart personal life on a being that seems to form out of a fusion of light, flesh and gold—part reality, part apparition and part incarnated color. The tones of red that are diffused in the cheeks, forehead, hair and neck, and concentrate in the delicate lips and tip of the nose, create an incandescent surface that appears lit from inside but also open to its surrounding light. Here pigment simulates and absorbs the layered gold which flickers at points with an inner intensity but also with a noetic presence that emanates from the eyes, the slightly

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said to have been "painted by smoke," much like the *sfumato* effect in the work of Leonardo da Vinci. An example of hesychastic iconography from the next century, is an excellent icon from the iconostasis of the Monastery of St. Cyril, "one of the most exquisite and spiritual moments of medieval Russian painting," discussed by Irina Shalina, "Catalog No. 17: *The Appearance of the Angel to the Myrrh-Bearing Women*, Moscow ca. 1497," in Grierson, *Gates of Mystery*, p. 109. The liturgy of the Resurrection with which this work resonates in Papayiannis, vol. 1, pp. 452, 454, 1269, 1062, 1067. An earlier icon of the same type has been attributed to the Moscow School of Andrei Rublev 1425–1427. Lazarev, *The Russian Icon*, p. 303. Vladimir Plugin, *Masters of World Painting: Andrei Rublev*, trans. Thomas Crane and Margarita Latsinova (Leningrad, 1997), pp. 3, 9.

[66] Plugin, p. 8.



13.4 *The Apostle Thomas*, mid. 14th century, Holy Metropolis of Thessaloniki, Greece

raised eyebrows, tight lips and unevenly exposed forehead. Silent and withdrawn, as if lost in thought or recollection, the figure has a past and present and is in full possession of its physical and noetic life. It is fragile and yet astute, youthful but solemn, with tender features but a cutting glance. Slender and austere when viewed from the perspective of its tall and lean body, it seems to rest more on its inner reality than on its physical form.

What we have seen in these four icons are admittedly only glimmers of the theophanic world that we deduced from the theologies of Maximus, Symeon and Palamas. Of the four, those of Theophanes and Rublev come

closest to suspending our ordinary perception of space, time and corporeal form and positing their own realities in a way that is both tangible and visibly transcendent. The distinction of background and foreground is simultaneously retained and suspended creating perspectives within the two compositions that suggest motion and stillness, engagement and withdrawal. These oppositions are reminiscent of the qualities that Photius saw in the apse mosaic of Hagia Sophia. In *The Holy Trinity*, voids and solids materialize in a fluid, luminous equilibrium that creates the impression of an expanding and yet integral reality. In this geometry of flesh and matter, light is ubiquitous and yet contained, corporeal and yet noetic. The icon has the resonance of an *acheiropoietos* that forms spontaneously out of its own space and readily in front of our very eyes, commanding present and eternal time—the *nun kai aei* that we mentioned earlier. When in the beginning of this study we suggested that the exemplary image is the equivalent in art of an *acheiropoietos*, this is what we meant.

How close can art come to theophany? This is a question that we can only answer by pointing at individual works. Like the saint, the theophanic image is rare and solitary. It is conspicuous in its hiddeness and vocal in its silence and requires a type of perception that is formed in *eusebeia* and in what we might call an aesthetic vigilance (*nepsis*). Here, seeing theologically and theologizing visually is what we must strive for. In theophany, there are no limits to what one can see of a God who at once conceals and reveals his being and allows creation to be known in its full goodness. When art comes under the light of theophany, we can expect a similar openness. Thus, within the Orthodox tradition, there is room for what in the spiritual life we might call "new saints." An art steeped in this spirit remains open to new possibilities. While never abandoning its ground, it brings its mystical vitality to bear on new forms. In the next chapter, we keep this ground in mind as we take a final look at Modernism.

14

Theophany and Modernism

Our discussion of Modernism in this chapter is indebted to Maritain's efforts to elucidate the relationship between Christian and secular art and explore the reasons for their occasional convergence. Even though we cannot agree with him that this convergence is a matter of spiritual ordination and find the impact of its psychological justification on the ontology of the art object problematic, the question itself remains essential. A Christian aesthetics that wishes to avoid the insularity of traditionalism on the one hand, and the facile syncretism of contemporary art criticism on the other, must follow Maritain's call for constructive dialogue with contemporary art.

Earlier we discussed how Russian Modernists appropriated the Byzantine icon and largely misconstrued its aesthetics and theology. We now take a positive look at Post-Impressionist and Modernist paintings which experiment with figuration, abstraction and the transformation of light, color and form and do so in ways that help us investigate a theophanic aesthetic outside the framework of the icon. We look at works by Camille Pissarro (1830–1903), Vincent Van Gogh (1853–1890), Robert Delaunay (1885–1941), Kandinsky, Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), Chagall and Rothko (1903–1970), we consider relevant excerpts from their writings, and identify similarities with paintings, icons and *ekphraseis* discussed in earlier chapters. We conclude by comparing *The Holy Trinity* and *The Savior* with two Rothko paintings.

The sensation of light in things and the transference of this experience to painting were central to the emergence of Modernist art. At first an Impressionist, Pissaro became interested in Georges Seurat's (1859–1891) pointillism, the application of small and tight units of color in order to achieve greater luminosity and precision in tone and color.[1] He used this method in a number of works in the mid and late 1880s. In *Ploughing at Éragny* (1886) the dotted surface mutes light and texturizes form. By contrast, in *Apple Harvest* (1888) (Figure 14.1) light permeates and de-materializes form.

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1 Christopher Lloyd and Amanda Renshaw, *Pissarro* (New York, 1992), p. 31.



14.1 Camille Pissarro, *Apple Harvest*, 1888, Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, Tex., U.S.A.

Baskets and bodies, trees and grass lose their solidity. It is not difficult to transpose these luminous dots to the icon of St. Thomas and imagine his portrait dissolve in light. The author of *Digenes* and the admirer of Eulalius' icons would have been fascinated.

Pissaro eventually abandoned pointillism because its "systematic division" of color brought about a "deadly leveling" to the work.[2] "I think continually," Pissaro wrote, "of some way of painting without the dot. I hope to achieve this but I have not been able to solve the problem of dividing the pure tone without harshness … How can one combine the purity and simplicity of the dot with the fullness, suppleness, liberty, spontaneity and freshness of sensation postulated by our impressionist art?"[3] In Seurat's paintings the world is viewed through a technique and that mediates form. Pisarro, by contrast, wanted to transfer the richness and subtlety of aesthetic perception to art. A painting should be an extension of the perceptual act and itself a

[2] Karen Levitov and Richard Schiff, *Camille Pissarro: Impressions of City and Country* (New Haven, 2007), pp. 20, 56, 93.

[3] Ibid., p. 11.

reality rather than a construct. This notion recalls Greek and Byzantine views of *enargeia* in painting where the image is so vibrant that it moves out of the picture plane and enters life.[4]

Apple Harvest forms out of the intensity and vibrancy of light. The image seems to register (and exist in) the moment that light actually permeates matter and transforms it into color. By bringing a temporal dimension to form, it gives the impression of a phenomenal, unfolding reality—to which the frame is an artificial boundary. Thus, as in the theophanic vision, what the image presents is not contained in its given time (as would the object of a picture and the picture itself) and space. In *Apple Harvest* it is the energy that illumination imparts on things that takes the image beyond the artifice of a "picture" (i.e., an image made to represent the world). Everything in sight, trees, people, soil, fruit seem absorbed in an act of appearance. They are neither nature nor art.

Van Gogh saw nature as filled with mystical energies.[5] Painting could tap into these forces to become a form of religion, an aesthetic liturgy. In color, there was mystagogy (but of an affective, psychical type):

> And in a picture I want to say something comforting, as music is comforting. I want to paint men and women with that something of the eternal which the halo used to symbolize, and which we seek to convey by the actual radiance and vibration of our coloring … portraiture with the thoughts, the soul of the model in it, that is what I think must come.[6]

Painting should impart on things an inner luminosity; it should replace artistic conventions designed to signify holiness with images of a sanctified nature.

The Sower (1888) (Figure 14.2) shows an iridescent landscape dominated by an explosive sun and a soil swelling with energy. Colors (especially purple and yellow) are radiant and vital. The searing sun melts everything in sight: man, house, soil, bird and horizon are splashed with color and light. Nature shines by virtue of its own majesty. The image is an aesthetic miracle: the man, the house in the distance, and the sowing field resonate with something transcendent.[7] The intensity and energy are impressive. But unlike Pisarro's *Apple Harvest*, color in *The Sower* becomes the dominant physical element: an alternative form of material subsistence. Saturated with color, soil and wheat become chromatic beings. Yellow is pigment turned to sky and sun. Purple is pigment turned to soil. A different order of materiality sets in that ties the image to art. Color is open to illumination,

4 A.I. Pallas, "Hai Aesthetikai Ideai ton Byzantinon pro tes Haloseos," *Epeteris*, 34 (1965): pp. 313–331.

5 Ann H. Murray, "The Religious Background of Vincent van Gogh and Its Relation to His Views on Nature and Art," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Supplement, 46 (March 1978): pp. 67–96.

6 Chipp, p. 35.

7 Murray, "The Religious Background of Vincent van Gogh."



14.2 Vincent van Gogh, *The Sower*, 1888, Rijksmuseum Kroeller-Mueller, Otterlo, the Netherlands

but it is not transformed by it. Things are open to color but color does not live in them. The blinding effect of theophany on the novice in spiritual life comes to mind. The diaphanous and ethereal face of Rublev's *The Savior* and the incandescent flesh of the St. Thomas icon are a point of contrast.

A distinction is due here. An image may show beings engaged in acts of being red, bronze or marble. Or, it may show them as simply having these qualities. Acts of redness and the quality red are two different things. I can paint a thing yellow but that does not make it a yellow thing. The idea is fundamentally Aristotelian but Étienne Gilson put it nicely: "whiteness is not what it is, it does not even exist, save that there exists a being which exercises the act of being white."[8] To make color formal is to de-hypostasize it. The redness of a rose and that of velvet may be similar but they are hypostatically different. Unless identical, two red roses are red in different ways. We can look at a flower and bring velvet to mind, because the velvet that we saw was not only red in the same way but it also had a particular kind of texture that matched that of the flower.

8 Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy*, p. 34.

To turn to more relevant examples, a red square that is red hypostatically must have redness by virtue of its being the particular square that it is. It must be *this* particular red square rather than any square in red. A red square without this dimension is a plastic concept. In *The Sower*, for example, we do not have plastic concepts. Yellow belongs to the wheatfield substantively or hypostatically and in that modality extends to the sky and sun (which bear the same texture). Color assumes the existence of soil and crop (in the painting they have the same consistency). It is in that sense a material as well as a plastic being, existing in the ambiguity of its two hypostases.

Artists who wrote on theoretical and aesthetic matters, often painted on the basis of a programmatic vision. Approaching abstraction on the basis of mostly conceptual (ideological) priorities, they had no interest in seeing form as tied to particular individuals and persons or forms of existence. Or, to put it differently, they rejected any kind of connection between existents and forms. Plastic concepts abound in Modernist painting and sculpture where they are supposed to assume an existence of their own and in this sense create a new ontology and canon for art.

In 1915, for example, Malevich explained the "new painterly realism" in this way:

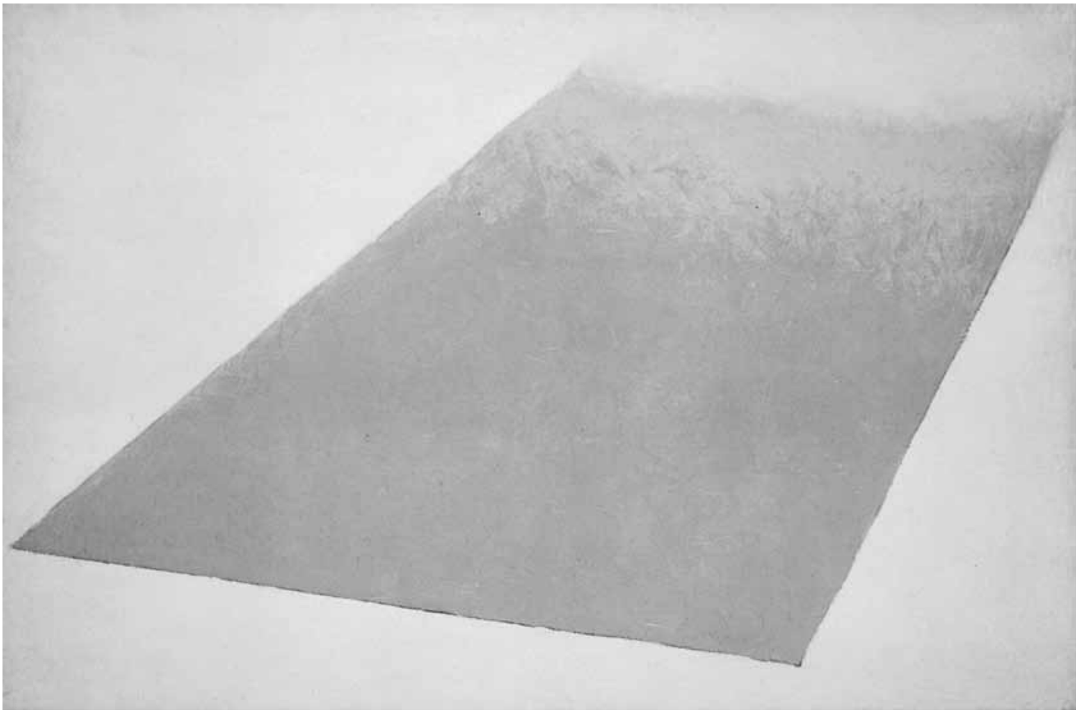
> I have destroyed the ring of the horizon and got out of the circle of objects, the horizon ring that has imprisoned the artist and the forms of nature … *Objects have vanished like smoke; to attain the new artistic culture*, art advances toward creations as an end in itself and toward domination over the forms of nature.[9]

The plan was to replace things with free (non-objective) forms so that art would cease to be bound to nature and representation. This idea is of interest to us because the theophanic image also needs a significant distance from both. But the problem with Malevich's plan is that it creates a different objectivity: that of ideas and ultimately of the artist (subject) that paints them. The purported autonomy of the aesthetic object is, in other words, deceptive.

In *Suprematist Painting* (1917–18) (Figure 14.3), the yellow rectangle gives the impression of a theoretical object or a compositional and chromatic experiment. The subject is yellowness and rectangularity. What happens when a rectangle is positioned on a diagonal axis and its color begins to dissolve (at the upper edge)? It is set in motion. It becomes a dynamic form. Rectangles as such are conceptual objects. Something may exist in nature that resembles Malevich's open rectangle but one cannot mistake the object in the painting with a natural object or phenomenon. It is rather an aesthetic puzzle; one that can be answered not by the way that the object is or exists aesthetically but by the ideas that preceded it—by the programmatic vision of which it is an illustration or expression.

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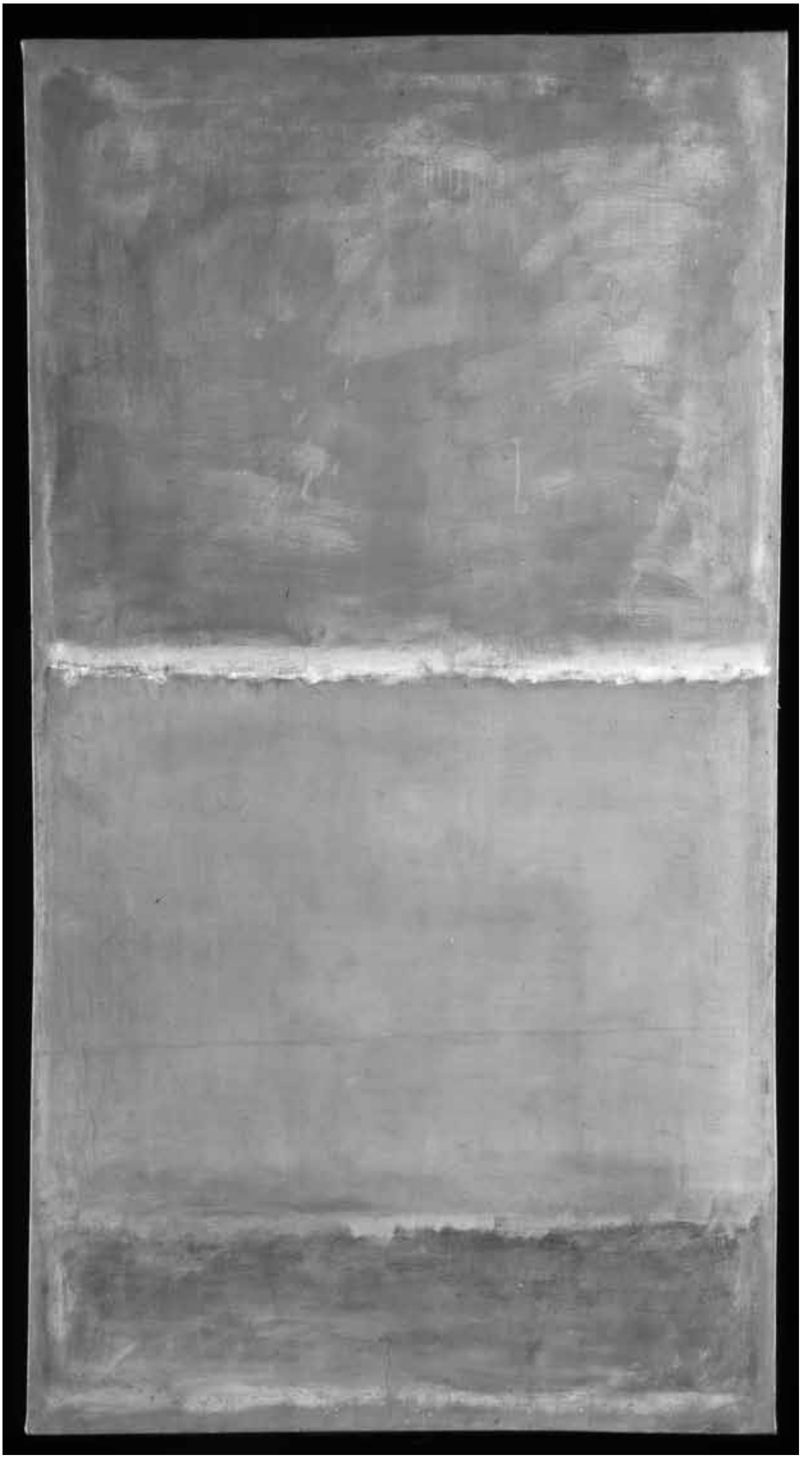
9 Bowlt, pp. 118–119.



14.3 Kazimir Malevich, *Suprematist Painting*, 1917–1918, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Thirty-four years later, Rothko created the painting in Figure 14.4. As in the Malevich image, color is the dominant element. But in this case it does not stand out as the detached object of an aesthetic proposition. Rather, it is part of a movement that permeates the image. Green, orange, yellow, white, purple, magenta and gray are present with different levels of intensity. Wherever color is, something is in motion. But it is not a mere chromatic, plastic event. Rather, colors fuse and coexist with light to create sheets of orange, magenta and green. But light has its own domain, which these color zones like sheets of clouds veil. There is a forward movement in the image as if this distant luminous horizon is breaking through and setting in motion the layers of color as they materialize in the vibrant surface. The animated rectangles recall clouds that precede thunderstorms in their thickness and vaporous texture or the surging and yet placid surface of a sea or lake. This is especially evident when the painting is seen in black and white. The entire image is in motion. But there is also a tension that keeps it still.

Color participates in its own being, a being set in its own time and space and existing in a perpetual state of presence and animation. It belongs to the image in an inherent, organic sense. It cannot be formal. It has no geometry because it is engaged in a certain form of life. It brings itself forth but not entirely. Restrained (measured) and yet open, the image seems to exist on the verge of self-disclosure, catching realities which are not yet objectified or may never be, enhypostasizing color which is here



14.4 Mark Rothko, *Untitled*, c. 1951–1952, Tate Gallery, London, U.K.

not a plastic entity but a being in its own right. In *Untitled* representation becomes irrelevant, as Malevich had dreamed. Art indeed has no object (not even itself). This, I think, is because it is not "art" anymore. It has become a living reality. Here we have no need to posit an original—i.e., something that the work imitates. Like Theophanes' angels, the image of luminous fields and nebular volumes passes through the painting and leaves it unperturbed—and it does not *have* to be that particular object (i.e., a "field") at all.

Rothko said about his art that it is "not abstract, it lives and breathes."[10] "I am not an abstractionist," he explained in an interview with art critic Selden Rodman, "I am not interested in the relationship of form to color or anything else. I am interested in expressing basic human emotions—tragedy, ecstasy, doom and so on."[11] *Untitled* is consistent with this idea. It presents a world in which the forms of art and life converge to create not mere analogs to feelings (or plastic similes) but tangible realities in which feelings subsist. Shapes, Rothko said, are "unique elements in a unique situation; they are organisms with volition and a passion for self-assertion; they move with internal freedom, and without need to conform with or to violate what is probable in the familiar world."[12] "They have no direct association with any particular visible experience, but in them one recognizes the principle and passion of organisms."[13] *Untitled* is one such organism.

Many avant-gardes were interested in optics and were fascinated with the idea of bringing art and science together, believing that the latter would be the ground of a new spirituality. We have already discussed this subject in Chapter 4. Interest in spiritual matters combined metaphysical and anthropological ideas (to recall Russian Modernists and the theosophical character of Florensky's theology). Disembodied essences floated in space like bundles of reflected light. To catch them in art and conceptualize them in metaphysics was a spiritual feat.

The work of Delaunay is a good example. Color and light show a world in motion. Nothing stays the same long enough to become an object in its own right. Painting that shows only solid things is at odds with "the vital movement of the world," Delaunay wrote.[14] It is "*descriptive, divisive*"

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[10] Jacob Baal-Teshuva, *Mark Rothko 1903–1970, Pictures as Drama* (Los Angeles, 2003), p. 50. Rothko amplified the first statement in an essay about his art published in *Possibilities* (Winter 1947–48 issue). "I do not believe that there was ever a question of being abstract or representational. It is really a matter of ending this silence and solitude, of breathing and stretching one's arms again." Chipp, pp. 548–549.

[11] Baal-Teshuva, *Mark Rothko*, pp. 50, 57.

[12] Ibid., 50.

[13] Chipp, p. 549. Baal-Teshuva, *Mark Rothko*, pp. 83–84. Andrea Pappas, "Invisible Points of Departure: Reading Rothko's Christological Imagery," *American Jewish History*, 92/4 (December 2004): pp. 401–436.

[14] Delaunay published "Light" in 1913 in the Expressionist magazine *Der Sturm*. Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman and Olga Taxidou (eds.), *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents* (Chicago, 1998), p. 195.

and "*literary*."[15] It is descriptive because it puts things on display without understanding (and showing) the forces that define them. It is divisive because it separates what light unites, and literary because it undermines the sensuous nature of things in favor of some idea or concept. Delaunay rejected that aspect of painting that has traditionally reified the world and thus lied about it.[16] Like Van Gogh, he thought that painting becomes vital only when it paints like nature does: "Light in Nature creates movement of colors"; "Art in *Nature is rhythmic and abhors constraint*"; "nature … engenders the science of painting."[17] The new art is part science and part mysticism. It is also primitive (and thus authentic). The first human images or "effigies" used the casting shadows of the sun to model their objects.[18]

As with pointillism, we know right away that the picture in Figure 14.5 has the perception of color as its subject (see page 278). But unlike Delaunay's later paintings, color here is still part of the world picture which appears indeed as if seen through a broken window or lens. The overlapping patches and their contrasting and fusing tonalities have a geometric quality that recalls the work of Malevich.

For Delaunay, color has a psychic consistency that makes painting spiritual and eliminates the need to imitate reality. Painting captures light and transcribes it in colors. A variegated, fluid picture emerges, like a transparency. Colors of any kind or shape of form are everywhere: "The simultaneity of colors through simultaneous contrasts and through all the (uneven) quantities that emanate from the colors, in accordance with the way they are expressed in the movement represented—that is the only reality one can construct through painting."[19] In this new kind of painting

> … our soul finds its most perfect sensation of life in harmony, and this harmony results only from the simultaneity with which the quantities and the conditions of light reach the soul (the supreme sense) by the intermediary of the eyes. And the soul judges the forms of the image of nature by comparison with the artifice of painting.[20]

As the Byzantines also intuited, color is the language of the soul. It is where psychic and physical realities meet.

Delaunay considered Seurat a pioneer in this field: "one of the first theoreticians of light."[21] More important was the influence of the French

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15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

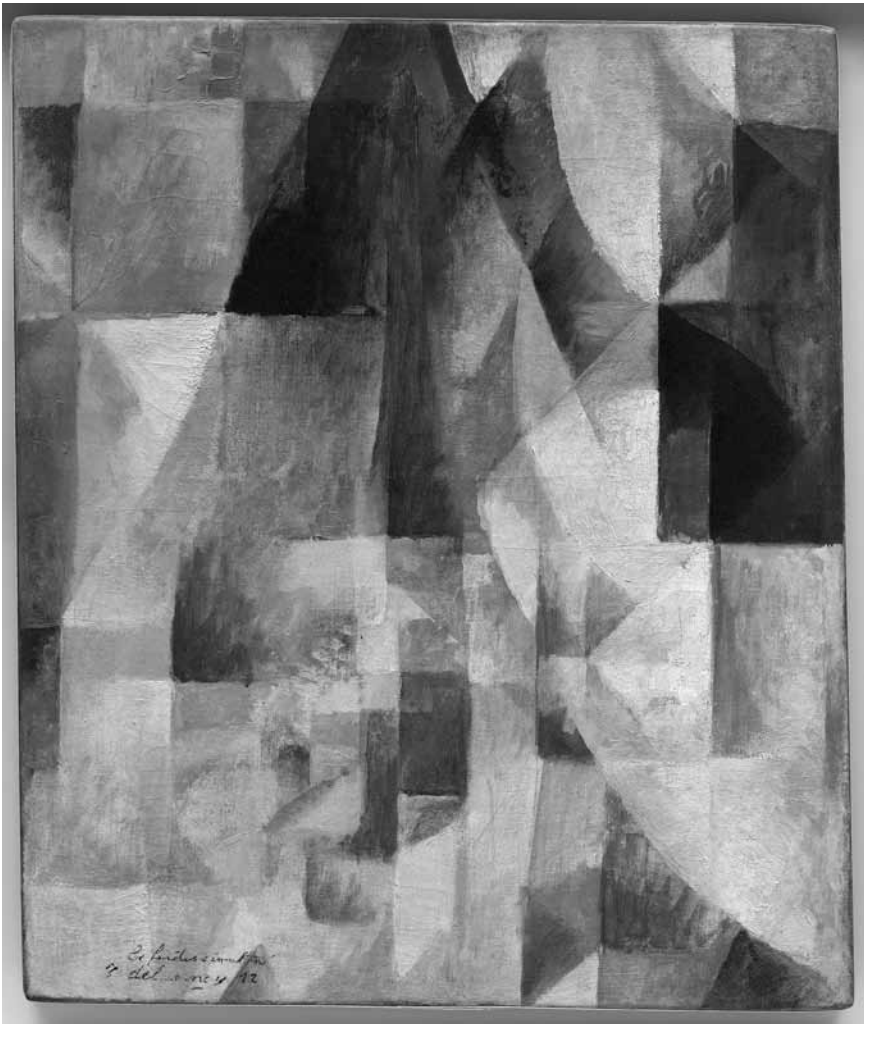
17 In an essay published in 1913 in *Der Sturm* and titled "Reality, Pure Painting." Ibid., pp. 194, 197.

18 Ibid.

19 An example is Delaunay's painting *Simultaneous Contrasts: Sun and Moon*, 1913 (dated on painting 1912). Reproduced in Sam Hunter (ed.), *The Museum of Modern Art New York: The History and the Collection* (New York, 1984), p. 107.

20 Kolokotroni, Goldman and Taxidou, pp. 194, 197.

21 Ibid., p. 196.



14.5 Robert Delaunay, *Simultaneous Windows (2nd Motif, 1st Part)*, 1912, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, N.Y., U.S.A.

art critic Charles Blanc (1813–1882) who saw color in terms of harmonies. Blanc wrote that color, like music, has a scale and principles, and its own science. He admired Asian art for the precision of its chromatic compositions: "oriental artists are infallible colorists since we never find a false note in the web of their colors."[22] This view was reflected later by Van Gogh who said of Japanese painters that "their work is as simple as breathing."[23] Motion and immateriality link music with color. For Blanc, translating things into vibrations and vibrations into colors, makes painting a form of musical composition (the reverse also holds): "As each sound echoes in modulating itself upon itself and passes, by vibrations of equal length, from fullness to a

[22] Charles Blanc, *The Grammar of Painting and Engraving* (*Grammaire des Arts du Dessin*) (Cambridge, 1874), p. 147.

[23] Chipp, p. 39.

murmur to silence, so each color seen in the solar spectrum has its maximum and its minimum of intensity; it begins with its lightest shade and ends with its darkest."[24] Color is "a mobile, vague, intangible element, while form on the contrary is precise, limited, palpable and constant."[25] Like our emotions and thoughts, color is dynamic and changeable.

Painting becomes a form of metaphysics and theosophy in Kandinsky. The artist *feels* the absolute. Once its "emotional vibration" reaches him, he strives to find "a material form capable of being perceived."[26] The "new painting," he wrote in 1910 about his work "must guide the spiritual evolution by adapting its forms for greater refinement and lead the way prophetically."[27] Refinement here means discarnation and de-objectification. Once the connection of things to the physical world is severed, what remains of them can enter psychical space and find its path to the spirit. Rather than paint a thing on the canvas, one paints an interior image, a concept-picture. To make the invisible visible, the visible needs to be dematerialized. "Everlasting and eternal" realities cannot be circumscribed.[28] They can only pass through form and disappear in the same spiritual realm from where they came.

Kandinsky was a practicing Orthodox. According to Andrew Spyra, he "read some Orthodox imagery as superficially Christianized representations of a far deeper psychic and preconceptual dynamic that was rooted in the shamanistic cultures of northern Russia and Siberia."[29] A "Creative" and "Abstract" Spirit is at work in the universe, Kandinsky wrote in the *Blau Reiter Almanac* in 1912.[30] Spirits create spiritual realities which in the physical world have only a transient existence.[31] As in an Areopagite universe, we see them and know right away that they are semblances or divine symbols or allegories. Form is "nothing more than the necessary medium through which today's revelation can be heard."[32] Its sole purpose is to capture the echo or "inner sound" of the absolute.[33] "It is only as a step towards this spiritual vibration that the physical impression is of importance."[34]

This is a spirituality of sensations and spectacles. The image is like a mirror behind which a transcendent reality remains invisible. Color becomes energy. Like music, it has a tonality; it is susceptible to motion (or to the impression of motion). Color stimulates the soul and the ensuing energy opens the door to the transcendent:

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24 Blanc, p. 148.

25 Ibid., p. 146.

26 Bowlt, p. 19.

27 A year later he published a long essay on these themes, *On the Spiritual in Art*. Ibid., pp. 21–22.

28 Ibid.

29 Spira, p. 129. Bowlt, pp. 21–22.

30 Kolocotroni, Goldman and Taxidou, pp. 270–271.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., p. 271.

33 Ibid., pp. 270–271, 273–274.

34 Chipp, p. 153.

> the eye is strongly attracted by light, clear colors, and still more strongly by colors that are warm as well as clear; vermillion stimulates like flame, which has always fascinated human beings. Keen lemon-yellow hurts the eye as does a prolonged and shrill bugle note the ear, and one turns away for relief to blue or green.[35]

Like a shaman, the artist awakens the soul by recreating its music:

> Generally speaking, color directly influences the soul. Color is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key or another purposively, to cause vibrations in the soul.[36]

For Kandinsky, spiritual beings are aesthetic phenomena of an extraordinary intensity. If a saint were to materialize in front of us, for example, his appearance would be one of striking and brilliant colors, sharp contrasts and clashing planes. In Figure 14.6 the blue has the transparent quality of stained glass, the lemon-yellow the harshness of a flood light.[37] Contrasting and luminous motifs gravitate toward the elongated, diagonal, spear-like band of lighter and darker yellows. Once there, they flash out in all directions, suggesting speed, noise and violence. The figure of the rider in *Composition* recalls an earlier painting, *St. George (Version II)* (1911), and repeats one of Kandinsky's favorite themes, that of St. George slaying the dragon. *Composition* resembles a photograph of an explosion that has caught things in the initial seconds of their disintegration. It may seem that we have here an instance of *enargeia* as the aesthetic object bursts out of the picture plane. But its dynamism is exactly the opposite. Rather than sustain the integral presence of what it puts forth, it perpetuates its dispersion and destruction. Absent is the quiet and still motion of theophany, where action is so deeply engrained in form that distinctions between rest and motion disappear. Light is plastic but it does not participate in the hypostatic presence of things. On the contrary, it is an inimical part of their rupture, fragmentation and dissolution.

We enter a different world with Picasso. "Colors, like features," the artist told Christian Zervos in 1935, "follow the changes of the emotions."[38] In his paintings, colors never leave the objects they create. The boundaries between picture, painter and viewer are fluid. Colors, like feelings, travel between the painter's mind and the forming image. But in the end, the image is an independent entity, a being in its own right. A painting "changes as one's thoughts change … when finished, it still goes on

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35 Ibid., p. 154.

36 Ibid., pp. 154–155.

37 Similar paintings of the same period include the set of four panels, *Painting No. 201*, *Painting No. 198*, *Painting No. 200* and *Painting No. 199* (Museum of Modern Art, New York) that Kandinsky painted for Edwin R. Campbell in 1914. See Hunter, pp. 86–87. *Painting No. 199* resembles *Composition* (1926) and an earlier version, *St. George (Version II)* (1911).

38 Chipp, p. 268.



14.6 Wassily Kandinsky, *Composition*, 1926, Russian State Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia

changing according to the state of mind of whoever is looking at it … [it] lives a life like a living creature, undergoing the changes imposed on us by our life from day to day."[39] Picasso discovers colors. He does not invent them or make them the subject of speculation. There is no metaphysics here, at least, not outside his works. A painting posits its own reality, from within its own space. If metaphysics happens, it happens in terms that the image itself defines. Powerful chromatic sensations get hold of the artist unannounced. As in Kandinsky, color is filled with sensations. It can be tasted, even swallowed: "I go for a walk in the forest of Fontainebleau. I get 'green' indigestion. I must get rid of this sensation into a picture. Green rules it."[40] One follows the color to where it wants to go. It is the things of this world that take over.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., p. 271.

The artist is not a master of the picture. There are no keys to hit or strings to pull. One becomes "a receptacle for emotions that come from all over the place: from the sky, from the earth, from a scrap of paper, from a passing shape, from a spider's web."[41] But painting is not there to record mental states and become a part of a personal or collective sphere of emotions and sensations. Picasso mocked those who tried to find either ideas or feelings in his paintings: "When I paint my object is to show what I have found and not what I am looking for … what one does is what counts and not what one had the intention of doing."[42] Just as colors suddenly appear and take over the artist's mind and body, so too a picture enters the artist's life. Its origin and destination are unknown: "A picture comes to me from miles away: who is to say from how far away I sensed it, saw it, painted it; and yet the next day I can't see what I've done myself."[43] Here the image precedes intention. When the intention becomes clear, the image is already formed. It never ceases to dominate. Nothing can (and should) stand in the way of its reality. Art springs from "what the instinct and the brain can conceive beyond any canon."[44]

Psychic realities exist deep in the aesthetic object like a mystical ground. They cannot be extricated from it: "ideas and emotions … form an integral part of it [the object], even when their presence is no longer discernible."[45] Once in the image, they have no independent, purely psychic, existence. This is why "they can't escape from the picture" and be attributed to the artist or to any other intentional entity (e.g., an ideology, a *Zeitgeist* etc.).[46] Even the "indelible mark" that the image leaves on the mind of the artist when it first appears belongs to the aesthetic object. The painting is not a mirror in which the artist can see his own face or mind. The work only shows its own being.[47] It thinks its own thoughts.

Picasso often sounds like Van Gogh, Pisarro and Delaunay. But there is one fundamental difference. The artist always defers to the work which has its own, independent reality:

> Though these two people once existed for me, they exist no longer. The 'vision' of them gave me a preliminary emotion; then little by little their actual presences became blurred; they developed into a fiction and then disappeared altogether, or rather they were transformed into all kinds of problems. They are no longer two people you see, but forms and colors: forms and colors that have taken on, meanwhile, the idea of two people and preserve the vibration of their life.[48]

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41 Ibid.

42 "Gertrude Stein joyfully announced to me the other day that she had at last understood what my picture of the three musicians was meant to be. It was a still life!" Ibid., p. 272. See also Ashton, *Picasso*, p. 3. "When I paint my object is to show what I have found and not what I am looking for … what one does is what counts and not what one had the intention of doing."

43 Chipp, p. 272.

44 Ibid., p. 271.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid., pp. 270–271.

Art has also its own time and history which exempt it from the categories of consciousness:

> I also often hear the word evolution. Repeatedly, I am asked to explain how my painting evolved. To me there is no past or future in art. If a work of art *cannot live always in the present* it must not be considered at all. The art of the Greeks, of the Egyptians, of the great painters who lived in other times, is not an art of the past; perhaps it is more alive today than it ever was (emphasis added).[49]

This view of the art object suggests the *enargic* image both in its internal composition and dynamics and in its incorporation of intentional and temporal realities. Painting paints beings: "you always start with something … everything appears in the guise of a 'figure'."[50]

Seated Bather (Figure 14.7) is one such being. The painting is often discussed in terms of symbolic qualities (for surrealist leanings).[51] But this is not what the aesthetic being that we encounter there suggests. The woman's displaced openness to space, and the tranquil integrity with which she rests there, bring to the blue and white tonalities a sense of gleeful lightness and transient stillness. The white areas are consonant with the color of morning sky and sea; the blue with that of sand and whitewashed wall. Present at multiple planes, the body reverts upon itself as would a structure resting on the edge of a shoreline. The shape, texture and arrangement of its parts recall the dispersed, once mobile panels of a stranded boat. This extends to the figure's head which seems imposed and artificially attached to its body. A gaping, part machine, part insect-like face blends with the sky and appears oblivious to its own form. Its wooden texture suggests solidity and stillness.

A being is present and presents its own world. One may wonder what it is but not *that* it is: "when a form is realized it is there to live its own life."[52] A form is realized when it reaches a degree of self-subsistence: when it exists as an integral being rather than as a picture of something that exists in another reality or space. Picasso returns to this idea when he discusses *Guernica* (1937), in a 1945 interview with Jerome Seckler. The work, he says, is not surrealist. It does not fit a label or a concept because it is not a representation: "They don't represent anything in particular. The bull is a bull, the palette a palette, and the lamp is a lamp. That's all."[53] The bull is a bull because it exists simultaneously as animal and image—in painting (and for the painter), it always has: "I just want to reproduce the objects for what they are and not for what they mean … I make a painting for the

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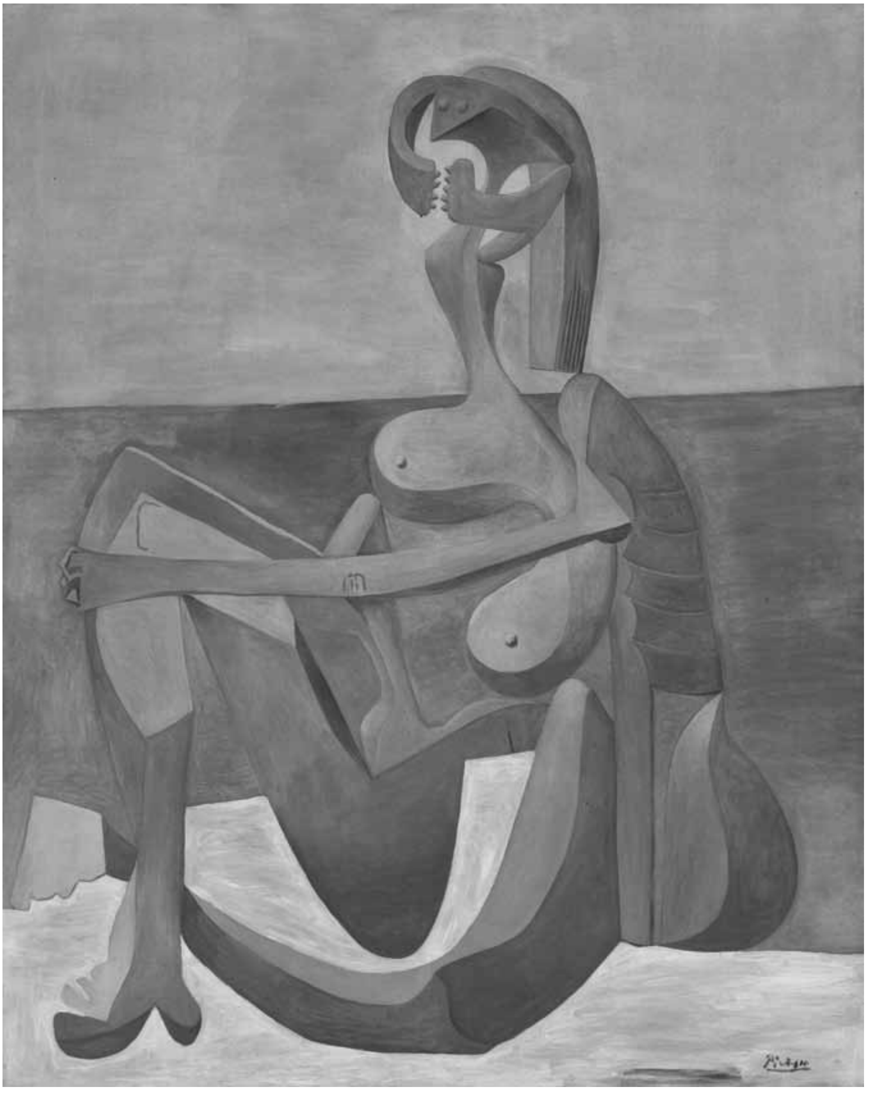
[49] Ibid., p. 264.

[50] Ibid., p. 270.

[51] The figure's head suggests a praying mantis with the implication of an aggressive, sinister sexuality. Hunter, p. 162.

[52] Chipp, p. 265.

[53] Ibid., p. 489.



14.7 Pablo Picasso, *Seated Bather*, early 1930s, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, N.Y., U.S.A.

painting. I paint the objects as they are."[54] This is why one can touch the bull or swallow green or open a painted window: "I deal with painting as I deal with things. I paint a window just as I look out of a window. If an open window looks wrong in a picture, I draw a curtain and shut it, just as I would in my own room."[55]

Where there is art (in the true sense of the word), there is ontophany. Things come to being and life. Intentions are the residue they leave behind. One may try to trace them there but she will find only shadows. Like Chagall (whom we met earlier in Chapter 4), Picasso considers conceptual art at odds

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid., p. 271.

with painting: "The idea of research has often made painting go astray, and made the artist lose himself in mental lucubrations. Perhaps this has been the principal fault of modern art."[56] Those who paint after ideas "paint the invisible and, therefore, the unpaintable."[57] On cubism in particular he said: "Mathematics, trigonometry, chemistry, psychoanalysis, music and whatnot have been related to cubism to give it an easier interpretation. All this has been pure literature, not to say nonsense, which brought bad results, blinding people with theories."[58]

Chagall had the same idea: "There are painters and that's it. Movements—they are theoretical conceptions. And the great painters have always been above movements … In order to speak of art you must talk in concrete terms and not clutter your thoughts with abstract concepts."[59] Between 1911 and 1913 Delaunay had criticized Chagall's work for being too literary and anecdotal to be considered avant-garde. Chagall countered that his paintings were actually more "abstract" than Kandinsky's.[60] He distinguished two types of abstraction. In the first type, the picture lacks any evident resemblance to actual things and is as a result "ornamental and decorative, and always restricted in its range."[61] In the second type, the picture is abstract in that it has never existed before. Rather than being an inadequate picture of the world, it is actually an altogether new reality: "something which comes to life spontaneously through a gamut of contrasts, plastic at the same time as psychic, and pervades both the picture and the eye of the spectator with conceptions of new and unfamiliar elements."[62]

Like Picasso, Chagall redefines abstraction. A figure is not abstract in relation to what it represents. It is abstract in that it makes something new which commands its own place in the world. It automatically sets up its own reality. Abstraction is the absence of "representationality" in the aesthetic object. Defined negatively, in the conventional sense, a figure is abstract which subtracts from the real and in so doing alludes to its absence. Defined positively, in the sense preferred by Chagall and Picasso, a figure is abstract which puts forth a new plastic reality that is physically and psychically vital. Applied to the aesthetic object as a whole, abstraction is the emergence of a plastic being or reality that lacks a reference to a particular original as its source. It therefore posits its own independent existence as a being (or reality) present for itself. This type of abstraction disposes a composition toward *enargeia*.

Chagall explains that his canvases are filled with "objects and figures employed as forms—sonorous forms like noises—passion-forms which

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56 Ibid., p. 264.
57 Ibid.
58 Ashton, *Picasso*, p. 6.
59 Baal-Teshuva, *Chagall*, pp. 322–323.
60 Ibid., pp. 277–278.
61 Ibid., p. 277.
62 Ibid. pp. 277–278.

should give a supplementary dimension impossible to achieve through the bare geometry of the cubists' lines or with the spots of the impressionists."[63] This sonority is not part of an analytic of color. It comes when things become impassioned and assume a plastic life of their own. Color is not a plastic concept. It is, rather, an aesthetic reality, one that has its own plastic and emotive life (its "passion-forms" as Rothko put it). In other contexts, Chagall calls this quality "chemical" or "chemistry."[64] Chemistry is what makes color organic. When color is chemical it is not a pigment, a concept or a quality objects have. It is a life-form.

In a lecture that he gave in Chicago in February 1958, Chagall said:

> Colour and all its distinctions are the pulses of the organism. Colour is the pulse of a work of Art … No speculation, no skeleton-like scheme can change the disposition and the flow of the born colours … I am often asked: what do you call colour and its chemistry? The same can be said of colour as is said about music: 'The depth of colour goes through the eyes and remains within the soul, in the same way that music enters the ear and stays in the soul.'[65]

Color resembles music because of its immateriality, energy and rhythm. Like music, it can reconstitute dynamic physical and psychical realities. The comparison to the human pulse emphasizes its vitality and dynamism but also its inherence in form.[66] When in 1973 the Russian critic and art historian Aleksandr Kamensky asked Chagall to define color, he explained that he understood the word beyond its usual aesthetic or technical sense: "Colour is purity. Colour is *art*. *Pure art*. Or its fundamental intonation …."[67] Thus color acquires a transcendent quality. Those can see it who like ascetics can tell the difference between a living image (apparition) and one that is nothing but temptation (delusion):

> In recent years, I have often spoken about the chemistry, about authentic color, and about painterly matter as a barometer of authenticity. A particularly sharp eye can see that authentic color and authentic matter contain in themselves every technical possibility as well as moral and philosophical content. If there is a moral crisis, there is also a crisis of color, of the moral material, the blood, and of the elements of the word, of sound, of all the components of art and life as well.[68]

For Chagall and Picasso, paintings are life-forms. In the *Bather* and other works objects dominate the space that envelops and shapes them through their plastic integrity and dynamism. They absorb space and at the same time fill it with their presence. Apparent distortions are harmonized in a world whose logic is set by the image. In Chagall, it is color that shapes reality. Expansive, vibrant,

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63 Ibid., p. 277.
64 Ibid., pp. 97, 322.
65 Ibid., pp. 180–181.
66 See also Chagall's lecture at Mount Holyoke College, August 1943. Ibid., p. 175.
67 Ibid., p. 322.
68 Chagall's lecture appeared in *Di godene keyt*, 50 (1964). Benjamin Harshav, *Marc Chagall and the Jewish Theater* (New York, 1992), p. 181.



14.8 Marc Chagall, *A Wheatfield on a Summer's Afternoon*, Study for backdrop for Scene III of the ballet *Aleko*, 1942, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, N.Y., U.S.A.

intense and evocative, it permeates everything in sight. Objects emerge in its midst as if they had always existed there. Nothing is transferred to the image from outside (or beyond). At the same time, nothing in it is exactly of the world as we know it. We can see this in one of the four backdrops Chagall painted for Leonide Massine's ballet *Aleko* (Color Plate 8; Figure 14.8).

Warm gold, fiery red and orange yellow, some of it sky, some of it water, soil and mist, dominate the image. Saturated with light, they envelop and permeate everything in sight. We see a field of light-speckled wheat and flowers, a slender sickle, a small boat in fluid blue with a solitary (distant) figure, a vertically suspended poplar branch with olive green leaves, and two suns. One is spinning around, inside a white moon; the other is hazy and humid and its rays are spilling as if blood or paint. Everything shimmers in heat and light. The silhouette of boat and rider, oars at rest, seems to linger in a small patch of isolated blue, overtaken by light and heat. The body of warm yellow water is swelling underneath. Right where the poplar's green edge barely touches the water, next to the sparkling flowers and wheat, the lake's surface is gleaming. A solitary sickle stands alone in mid-air with no hand in sight. Washed in hues of red and dark orange with a bleeding sun, this is a plastic and physical (somatic) landscape (moist in paint and blood). Remnants of spring are still visible in a pervasive summer. The scene gives off a sense of fragile but lasting stillness and brightness, as if fusing an incinerating noon with a radiant sunset.

A comparison between the *Bather*, *A Wheatfield* and *Untitled* reveals a similar type of movement in the aesthetic object. In the *Bather*, the figure's integrity is enhanced by the manner in which its fragmented body embraces and articulates its blue, beige and white environment. Dispersed but complete in its own reality, the body is as shallow and open as it is solid (similar to an exposed wooden structure) and closed. In *A Wheatfield*, light and color turn simple forms into enunciating beings that break the silence of the world they inhabit and create. Without them, the sickle, the poplar branch, the boat and its occupant would be nothing more than signs in need of a narrative or a disambiguating code to justify their existence. Those familiar with the storyline of the ballet, will see in the painting not an illustration but a parallel reality.

When Chagall spoke of chemistry and blood, he spoke as he painted. In *A Wheatfield* color actually (visually) breathes and takes on the consistency of water, air, heat and sunlight. Similar movements can be observed in the Rothko painting. A refulgent, dazzling light pierces through a schism formed by two (rectangular) fields of iridescent red and orange, only to disappear behind them as through a veil. Ubiquitous and yet concealed, it lends a sonorous and tense balance to their pulsating, shimmering surfaces. On the upper side, a beam of yellow recedes into orange and red, drawing the entire form (or body) toward a distant, nebulous depth.

Paradoxical shifts occur within the three images: openness and closure in *Bather*, enunciation and silence in *A Wheatfield*, ubiquity and concealment, frontality and recession in *Untitled*. They recall the tensions that characterize theophanic experience as described by Symeon and Palamas—e.g., Palamas' "we see invisibly" (*oromen aoratos*).[69] The Palamite description of the divine vision as a "sight" (*thea*)—it is not a "symbol" (*symbolon*), a "semblance or analogy" (*eikotos*), or an "illusion" (*plasma*)—finds a near pictorial analog in *A Wheatfield* and *Untitled*.[70] Color signifies by an act of inherent significance and consummate presence. There is no room for semblance and artifice.

Rothko's distrust of illusion (and perspective) is well-documented. Painting should follow the "proper development of the subject in the spirit of utmost integrity to its own materials."[71] "Flat forms … destroy illusion and reveal truth" because, as in *Untitled*, the image pulsates with an inner motion that evokes a deeper, subsisting reality.[72] In 1943, before he started painting his classic abstract paintings (and stopped putting titles on his works), Rothko said that his pictures "depart from natural representation only to intensify the expression of the subject implied in the title, not to dilute or efface it."[73] Abstraction here, as in Chagall, is seen as an act of animation: "any picture

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[69] *The Triads*, I.iii.20.

[70] Ibid., I.iii.5, 18; II.iii.8, 20.

[71] Anna C. Chave, *Mark Rothko: Subjects in Abstraction* (New Haven, 1989), p. 28.

[72] Ibid. Chave argues from this conventional standpoint that Rothko cannot escape depth in his abstract paintings.

[73] Ibid.

which does not provide the environment in which the *breath of life* can be drawn does not interest me" (emphasis added).[74] In order to show the world, art must first make it disappear by introducing its own beings.

Like *Untitled*, *A Wheatfield* and *Bather* are tangible examples of *enargic* movement in the art object. In *A Wheatfield*, light and color reach a level of enhypostasizing energy that animates everything in sight and brings it to a state of perspicuous existence. We can see this in the singular poplar branch beaming with life and motion or in the sickle that is suspended in a reaping moment over the field of wheat and flowers. In the *Bather*, the faceted body and asymmetrical ground of the seated figure cut right into the passive atmospheric blue. Figure and horizon merge but their tension remains. Through the quiet intensity of its shape, the figure brings its surrounding space to a state of contained motion. Ready to move at any moment, it seems to linger in its own reality, contained and at rest within its faceted and yet coherent being.

Symeon wrote that the divine light illuminates all things in sight symmetrically (*photizon symmetros*). *A Wheatfield* can help us visualize how in theophany objects are transformed without losing their identity.[75] The nearly diaphanous sickle sparkles. The poplar branch seems to belong to an invisible tree from where it bends into the water and light. The boundaries between sky, earth and water are open. In Symeon and Palamas, the ascetic partakes of (*methexis*, *ektheosis*) the divine and human life all at once.[76] God's energies and those of beings (their *logoi*) are perfectly aligned. Whatever transpires in *A Wheatfield* happens in a world that is ready to receive it, as if its moment has finally come. To paint a lake and a boat realistically in this case would be a dead picture. This is what Christianity has all along opposed in the idol (the dead image made alive in cult).

Palamas' (and Symeon's) distinction between the flashing, incidental illumination (*epilampsin*) experienced by the novice and the "perpetual vision of light" (*diarkes photos thea*) that marks theophany has an aesthetic parallel in *Untitled* and *A Wheatfield*. In the former, it is the pervasive light that saturates the converging triangles and brings them to a searing proximity. In the latter, it is the vivid constancy with which light animates water, air and soil and the luminous existence of everything in sight.[77] There are even some interesting parallels between the language of Symeon's Hymn XVII and the iconography of *A Wheatfield*. Symeon describes the divine light as a "fiery" (*pyr*) and "luminous cloud" (*photos nephele*) and witnesses its transformation into a "superlative sun" (*helios apoteleitai*) that "hovers [over him] like a brilliant star" (*aigle photophoros perieptatai*).[78]

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[74] Baal-Teshuva, *Mark Rothko*, p. 45.

[75] Symeon the New Theologian, *Traitès Théologiques*, vol. 1, pp. 302, 304 (12:420–425, 430–435).

[76] *The Triads*, I.iii.18, 21.

[77] Ibid., I.iii.18.

[78] Symeon the New Theologian, *Hymnes II*, pp. 36, 38 (27:319–370).

Writing of Rothko's work in 1978, the critic William Packer compared them to Byzantine icons and described his impression of them in these words: "The paintings sat quietly on the walls, calm, simple, glowing objects of contemplation possessed of the emotional power and impassive authority of the authentic icon."[79] In her in-depth study of Rothko's art, Anna Chave mentions the painter's interest in the Greek Fathers, especially Origen and possibly John Climacus—Rothko, according to Dore Ashton, liked "the 'ballet' of their thoughts, and the way everything went toward ladders."[80] Generalized comparisons and statements of interest or intention by the artist should be treated with caution, but there is reason in this case to pay attention.

Rothko's paintings challenge the norms of Christian iconography more than the work of Chagall and Picasso (or even Delaunay and Kandinsky) but they also help us take the theophanic image beyond the confines of the icon as we know it. Descriptions of the divine light do not suggest a highly saturated yellow or gold tone, as we typically associate with icons. They speak instead of a "soft Light" that "embraces from without" and can, by virtue of these qualities and its intense and constant luminance, be distinguished in appearance from ordinary, natural light.[81] Symeon's "luminous cloud," mentioned earlier, points to the direction of white as does his reference to "springing water" (*hydor vryon*) or a luminant "crystal rock" (*krystallinos lithos*).[82] Comparisons to sunlight, moonlight and the flame of an oil lamp in his hymnography suggest tones of orange, yellow, white and blue.

We should be careful, of course, not to use Symeon's poetry or the accounts of contemporary *hesychasts* as manuals for a theophanic iconography. This, as we have shown, would be contrary to how Orthodox theology understands *theosis*, being and art. We can, however, allow individual works to speak for themselves. Thus in closing I would like to put two exemplary icons and two Rothko paintings side by side and to identify areas where they converge and where the Modernist image becomes relevant to a theophanic aesthetic. The first pair is *No. 9* (1958) (Color Plate 3; Figure 14.9) and Theophanes' *The Holy Trinity* (Color Plate 2; Figure 14.10). The second is Rothko's *No. 15* (1951) (Color Plate 5; Figure 14.11, see page 292) and Rublev's *The Savior* (Color Plate 4; Figure 14.12, see page 294).

Despite clear differences in composition, the two images have a noticeable chromatic and expressive resemblance. The vaporous white rectangle that hovers over its maroon counterpart is vivid, energetic, luminous and soft in a tactile sense. So is the field of white that envelops and illuminates the faces, bodies and wings of the three angels seated around the table, and forms their himatia and tunics. With a palpable and yet elusive energy, white underlies

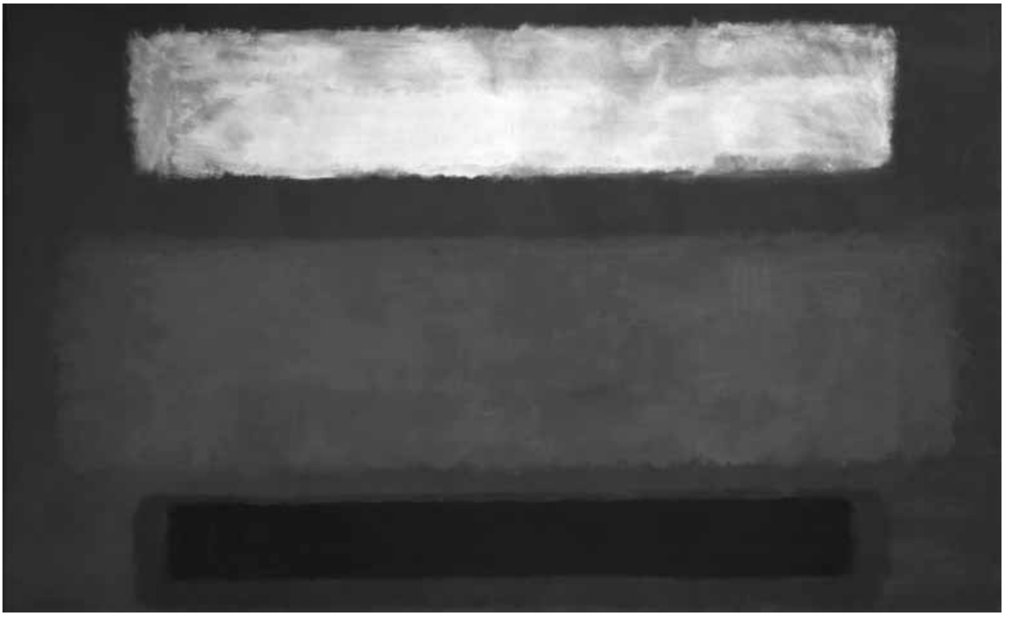
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79 The passage is quoted in Chave, p. 36. William Packer, "Mark Rothko: The Inward Landscape," *London Financial Times*, 6 (November 1978): p. 21.

80 Chave, p. 36. Dore Ashton, "The Rothko Chapel in Houston," *Studio International* (June 1971): pp. 273–275.

81 Sophrony, *We Shall See Him*, pp. 166, 171.

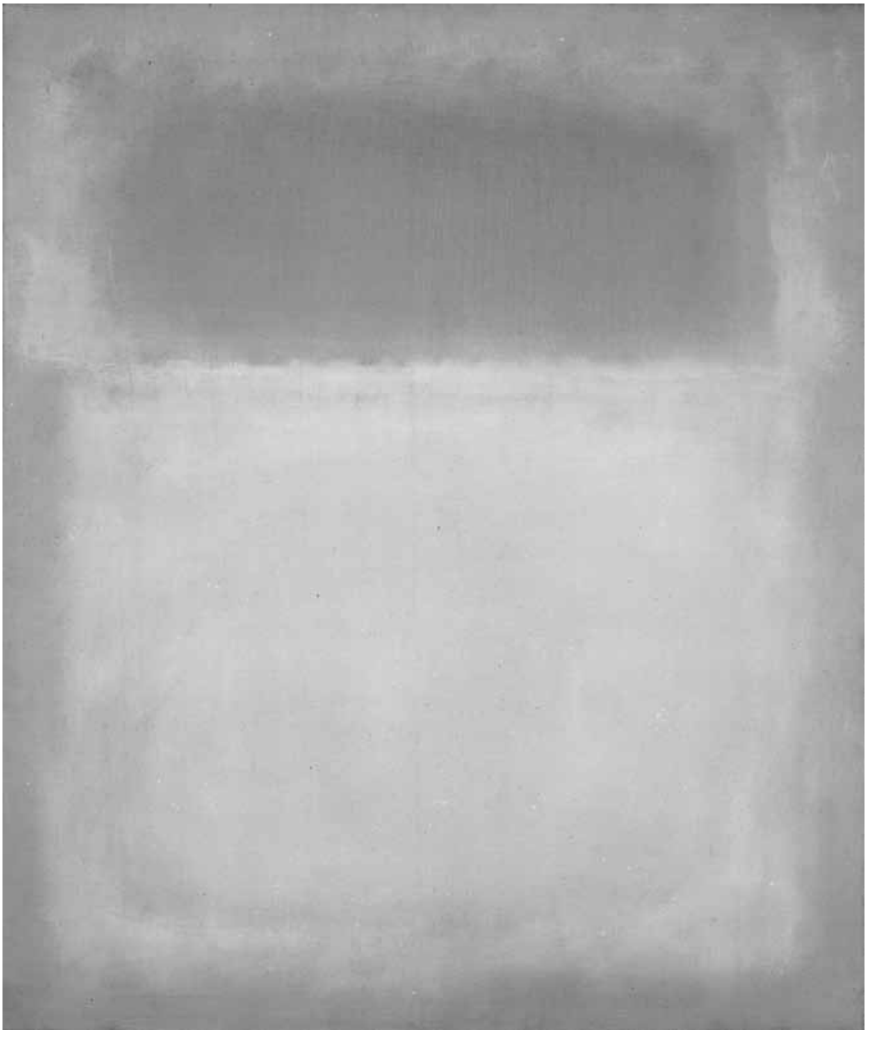
82 Symeon the New Theologian, *Hymnes II*, pp. 228, 444 (24:15–25, 35:53–60).



14.9 Mark Rothko, *No. 9*, 1958, Collection of the Fukuoka City Bank Ltd., Fukuoka, Fukuoka Prefecture, Japan



14.10 Theophanes the Greek, *The Holy Trinity (Hospitality of Abraham)*, c. 1374, Cathedral of Transfiguration, Ilyina Street, Novgorod, Russia



14.11
Mark Rothko, *Untitled*, 1951, The National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., U.S.A.

the maroon and brown areas of the two paintings and motions forward, creating depth and volume and in the case of the angels the appearance of corporeality. In both paintings, illumination is subtle, textured and contained and exists as an indistinguishably chromatic and ontic reality. The manner in which they simultaneously posit and negate form is also strikingly similar. In *No. 9*, the white rectangle seems to surge inside and outside its frame, as if emerging from another dimension or reality hidden behind the layers of red, maroon and black. In *The Holy Trinity*, the white that forms the background, highlights and part of the angels garments brings the brown portions of the image to a state of tentative existence, as if at any moment they could be absorbed in a fusion of light and matter and disappear from sight.

Resilient and yet on the verge of dissolution, the rectangles persist as if to affirm the substantiality and volatility of the realities that the image creates. A

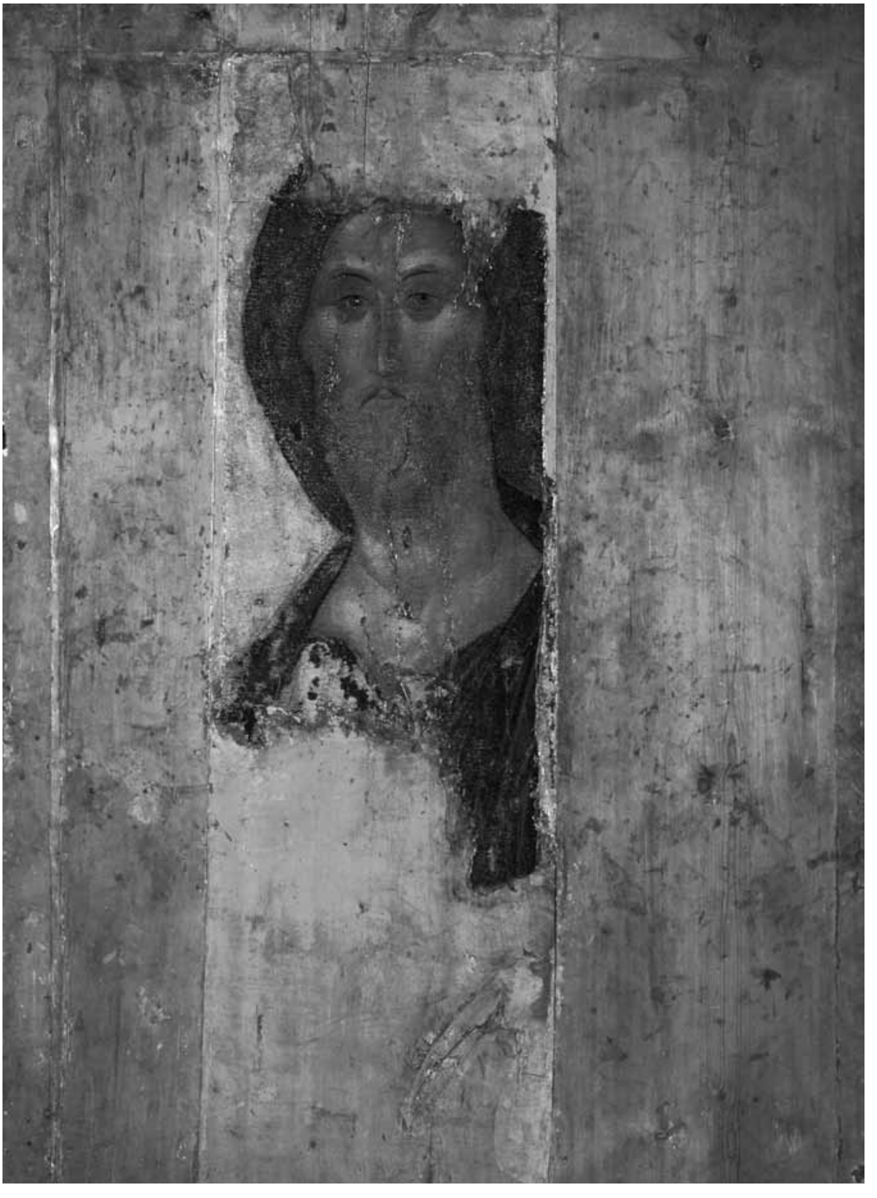
similar tension is evident in the Theophanes icon. Aided by the central figure's framing wings, which lift the entire composition out of its physical space on the wall, the white areas and highlights bring everything in sight to a state of imminent flight and resolute presence. There are also differences. The intensity and depth of Rothko's chromatic beings are absent from the Theophanes fresco. And the rapidly drawn highlights which bring to the wings, faces and bodies of the icon's angels and to everything in sight a weightless luster are almost inconceivable in the dense and saturated world of *No. 9*. Exemplary images are not confined to a certain era or movement. Nothing prevents Theophanes' fresco from being fully integrated in the Modernist cosmos. And nothing excludes *No. 9* from the world that theophany opens to the senses and to all aspects of experience.

In the exemplary icon, layers of paint gradually make light shine out of what in the portraits and images of saints takes the being of flesh—as we have seen in the St. Thomas and St. Panteleimon icons. The same effect can happen where flesh or a discernible being is absent and the movement simply exists as a hypostatic modality expressed in color. Thus, in Rothko certain realities emerge that are not objectified (as in figurative painting) but are still, to recall Picasso, figures in their own right because of the reality that the image creates and perpetuates by its own existence. In *The Savior*, Christ's face comes to life out of a fusion of light and color where color gradually creates the being that we see, a being that belongs to the world possessed by the image. It is thus iconic and apparitional because it is forming right as one sees it and as long as the image exists both on the panel and in the viewer's mind—as Picasso suggested about the lives of images.

In *Untitled*, a diaphanous layer of evaporating white forms over the orange and pink rectangle, but also inside it where orange that was once brighter—and has left a visible trace of that existence—is now being subdued or softened. The light that is diffused in the animated, energy-filled field of yellow, but is more intense at the edges of what seems to open like a window inside its frame, has already entered matter and imparted on it the first resonances of movement, expression and life. Thus we may have here a proto-epiphany of being, a simultaneous rupture of art and world where both open to the new realities that theophany brings about. Rothko's rectangles have their own lives. Their shapes are as tentative and open as the depth that they create by radiating their presence from within their own space. Here, light and color reach beyond their own realities and toward the formation of yet unknown or unencountered forms. Inversions are possible as are shifts within the image from one rectangle to another, from one shape to another, the key to the movement remaining uncertain.[83]

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[83] Choreographic movements in painting are discussed in Rudolf Arnheim, *The Power of the Center: A Study of Composition in the Visual Arts, The New Version* (Berkeley, 1988), pp. 34–35, 168–170.



14.12 Andrei Rublev, *The Savior*, c. 1394, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia

There is energy and contained motion, rest and fluidity, concentration and dispersion. Nothing is solid or confined to its own singular existence. The image exists in a delicate and quiet equilibrium. It is not a flat and placid tableau but an unspecified and yet tangible portion of world.

In *The Savior*, we encounter lightness and quiet, transience and presence. In *No. 9* and *Untitled*, form has an inner animation, a silent actuality. Color is suffused with its own reality and luminant energies. It asserts its own being and that of the world it inhabits. What is plastic is actual and aesthetic at the same time. It also resonates with a noetic motion, as if color thinks its own

reality and then somehow speaks it (or hums it). In Maximus, theophany is ontophany. The world opens to its deified reality and is seen for what it is, alive in its own perfected being. This opening to deification and plerotic existence art also claims by virtue of being *in* the world rather than standing on the other side as its likeness or semblance.

Our journey through avant-garde art in search of theophanic forms has been quick and by no means thorough. Modernism's experiments with color and light and the struggle to assert the autonomy and transcendent reality of the aesthetic object, or paint the holiness of the world, have not lost their relevance. Probed more systematically, they may have more to yield that will bring the art of the first sixty years of the last century closer to Christianity's theotic imagery. Non-Christian iconographies should also be subject to the same openness and with the same expectations. Our final chapter is a conversation in this spirit with the art of Zen Buddhism.

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Enargeia and Transcendence in Zen Art

In this chapter we explore similarities and differences between the theophanic icon and the image of enlightenment in Zen Buddhism. These include the transcendentalization of nature in Zen painting and the view of paintings and poems as instances of enlightenment. A divinized nature is not a common theme of Orthodox iconography, even though cliffs and sky, trees, rivers and the sea, do in some icons reach that level of existence. Neither are icons typically approached as instances of theophany, even though we have seen *ekphraseis* that point in this direction. A consideration of Zen art in this context will help expand our understanding of the theophanic image and serve as a vantage point from which to look critically at its aesthetic and theological peculiarities. The Zen image, as we suggested earlier, has its own form of *enargeia*.

Chinese and Japanese paintings in monochrome ink (*sumiye*) are typically associated with Zen practice. They reflect the paradoxical equation of formlessness and form that is implicit in the Zen concept of emptiness (*sūnyātā*, *wu*, or *mu*) and the kind of awareness and receptivity to how things subsist in their "thusness" (*tathatā* and *Prajnā*) that is suggested by the terms *dhyana* (ch'an, zen) and *samādhi*. These concepts are combined in the Chinese term *ch'an-ting*, the state of quietude or tranquility of one who practices meditation.[1]

The relationship between Zen philosophy, practice and art is fluid and rich, and assumes a continuity between spiritual and aesthetic experience and expression that is absent in Christianity. Zen engages the world in a spontaneous, simple and terse manner. It affirms at one and the same time its fragility and resilience, its instantaneous reality and perennial transformation. It is therefore easy to see in Zen practice the roots of a distinct sensibility and aesthetic. According to D.T. Suzuki, Zen painting abandons representation and resemblance and delves wholeheartedly in the life that transpires in ink and paper, dissolving all distinctions between image and reality: "… a Sumiye

[1] D.T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (3 vols, London, 1949), vol. 1, pp. 79–83. D.T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (3 vols, London, 1970), vol. 3, pp. 222–238, 243–263.

picture is a reality itself, complete in itself, and no copy of anything else. The mountains here are real in the same sense as Mount Fuji is real; so are the clouds, the stream, the trees, the waves, the figures."[2] The Zen image is full of life and energy. Its autonomy and spiritual resonance recall the exemplary icon. But there are also significant differences.

One such difference is the depiction of nature. Nature is central to the Zen conception of enlightenment but receives little attention in Orthodox theology, despite the fact that from the first centuries of Christianity asceticism befriended the desert and remote mountain areas, and ascetics often pronounced their love of plants, flowers and wild animals. In the counsels of contemporary *hesychasts* who have experienced the divine light, we find references to how its presence makes them feel "sympathy for all creatures" but little else.[3] Nature provides analogies and metaphors to describe the spiritual life (e.g., "the life of the spirit is like living water" etc.) but it does not itself become the subject of prayer and reflection.[4] The sacred landscape is used as a background to the depiction of divine persons and saints, but never as a subject in its own right.

Another area is poetry. Whereas poems accompany the painting of Buddhist and secular themes in Chinese and Japanese art, and often present their own enlightenment imagery, Orthodox iconography uses inscriptions mainly to identify holy persons and quote Scripture.[5] Except for hymnography and the poetry of ascetics like Symeon, there is no significant interface between poetry, theology and iconography in the Orthodox experience. A third area is the experience of the phenomenal world. Even though Orthodox ascetic manuals abound with references to the fleeting nature of all things, there is little reflection on the aesthetic aspects of this experience or the extent to which it can actually help shape the ascetic life. Attachment to the ephemeral world is the cause of delusion in both religions, but Zen is far more interested in actually showing the absurdity of these bonds by means of paintings and poems—literally painting and poeticizing it—than in simply condemning them as sources of temptation. Thus paintings and poems become essential to the teaching and practice of Zen and the formation of the Zen mind, a role that icons do not have in Orthodoxy.

On the other hand, portraiture and the human figure receive less attention than nature in Zen than they do in Orthodox (and Catholic) iconography.[6]

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[2] Suzuki, *Essays*, vol. 3, p. 353.

[3] Sophrony, *We Shall See Him*, p. 184.

[4] Ibid., p. 97.

[5] On the complementary nature of painting and poetry, and poetry composed by the Ch'an monk Hui-Hung in the eleventh century on a series of paintings by Wang Hung known as *Eight Views of the Hsiao and Hsiang Rivers*, see Alfreda Murck, "Eight Views of the Hsiao and Hsiang Rivers," in Wen Fong (ed.), *Images of the Mind: Selections from the Edward L. Elliott Family and John B. Elliott Collections of Chinese Calligraphy and Painting at the Art Museum, Princeton University* (Princeton, 1984), pp. 214–235.

[6] Helmut Brinker, "Ch'an Portraits in a Landscape," *Archives of Asian Art* (Asia Society), 27 (1973/1974): pp. 8–29. Heinrich Dumoulin, "The Person in Buddhism: Religious

Depictions of the Buddha, bodhisattvas, Zen patriarchs and revered priests are largely hieratic and more concerned with portraying the moral qualities and character of the sitters than their enduring qualities of presence and personality. As in the Byzantine icon, there is formalism and institutional priorities in depicting important Buddhist figures in teaching settings where they exercise and display their authority. When persons are placed in nature, they are seen passing through it or participating in its life, but they are usually far less vivid in presence than the trees and mountains that surround them.[7] Even in direct portraits, the energy that imbues nature is not transferred to the human personality which, in contrast to paintings of trees, grass, mountains and rivers, appears frozen in its particular features and incidentally related to its surroundings.[8] In landscape painting nature assumes a transcendent form of existence that is typically absent from the portrayal of persons.

Enargeia, as we shall see in some detail below, has a different modality in the Zen image than it has in the Orthodox icon where things (typically persons) express an inherent vitality that defies change and transformation. In the *sumiye* image, by contrast, persons express a shared, ambient vitality. They are in this respect transient as well as fully present in their moment of existence. In the first case, *enargeia* is contained in the painted object qua object. The vivid way of being belongs to it exclusively. In the second, it is simultaneously contained in the environment in which that object exists. A thing becomes vivid by its placement in a certain order rather than by an act of self-expression.

These opposed modalities reflect significant ontological differences between Christianity and Zen Buddhism. Theophany brings beings to a state of perfected existence. In Zen, by contrast, the issue of perfection does not arise for individual beings even though when grasped in their state of thusness or *tathatā*, things are present in a unitive and distinctive modality not visible in ordinary experience. This reflects the Buddhist doctrine of *Anatta* or no-self according to which beings have no independent existence, no self-subsisting identity. When grasped with the eye of *Prajnā* or enlightenment wisdom, their reality is understood for what it is: dharma-nature or *hossho*.

According to Suzuki, in thusness "pluralities in all forms vanish" and things "are understood in their relations, not only to one another but to that which makes up their reason of being."[9] In the *Lotus Sutra*, the Buddha explains: "what is called 'all dharmas' is form as it is, the nature as it is …." All things and the universe possess this nature in which they abide in their multiple

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and Artistic Aspects," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 11/ 2/3 (June–September 1984): 143–167.

7 Brinker notices this discrepancy and attributes a Ch'an portrait in which it is most evident to the work of two painters. Brinker, "Ch'an Portraits in a Landscape."

8 There are exceptions in sculpture e.g., the image of Ganjin (c. 763) in the Tōshōdaiji, Nara, or that of Muchaku by one of the masters of the Kei School, Unkei (d. 1223) in the Kōfokuji, Nara.

9 Suzuki, *Essays*, vol. 3, p. 252.

manifestations. Eihei Dōgen (1200–1253), the founder of the Sōtō sect of Zen, refers to this passage in the *Shōbōgenzō* and explains the Buddha's saying in this way: "So opening flowers and falling leaves are just the nature as it is."[10] Even thinking that the Dharma nature is not such (i.e., opening flowers and falling leaves) is part of the Dharma nature, he adds later.[11]

An exemplary image in this tradition must have "spirit resonance" (*ch'i-yün*), a concept that we introduced in Chapter 2. Like *enargeia*, *ch'i-yün* describes a condition of vividness or vitality in a painting that transcends verisimilitude. It is also expressly associated with the exemplary or inspired image in Chinese critical texts.[12] The Sung author Huang Hsiu-fu (c. 1006) says of such paintings that their "subtleties echo natural transformations." He then asks rhetorically, conjuring an image that recalls Byzantine visions of saints descending from walls: "Is this not what was said about their disappearance on the opening of a cabinet, or of their flying away after plucking themselves off a wall?"[13]

An early treatise by Hsieh Ho (c. 490) first defines *ch'i-yün* as an aesthetic formula for all art that "deals concisely with the problem of creative 'vitality,' 'harmonious manner' of execution and 'aliveness' of drawing in painting."[14] *Yün* in particular was associated with elegance or grace in lively or essentially vital form.[15] As the vital principle of all beings, *ch'i* is dispersed in the universe. It is the breath of life and substance (similar in certain respects to *pneuma* and *logos*) that can be found in all things and in the painted image that is open to this spiritual truth.[16] In the opinion of the distinguished painter and art critic Li Jih-hua (1565–1635), one's brush must "take" what it finds in nature and deliver its likeness but it must also "yield" that likeness to convey something of the transcendent essence of the subject: "Everything is there, even though not executed."[17] This is how an image becomes an instance of enlightenment. Li compares the painter who masters this to the Buddha who "spoke by natural inspiration, without any effort, about past kalpas, their causes and effects, which manifest and dissolve in a mysterious fashion beyond human comprehension, though never contrary to truth and reason."[18]

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10 Eihei Dōgen, *Master Dogen's Shōbōgenzō*, trans. Gudo Nishijima and Chodo Cross (3 vols, Tokyo, 1997), vol. 3, p. 107.

11 Ibid., p. 109.

12 Michael Sullivan, *The Birth of Landscape Painting in China* (Berkeley, 1962), pp. 106–108.

13 Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih (eds.), *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 101.

14 Weng Fong, "Chi-yun-sheng-tung: Vitality, Harmonious Manner and Aliveness," *Oriental Art*, 12 (1966): pp. 159–164.

15 Ibid., p. 162.

16 Sullivan, p. 108. Miyeko Murase, Stephanie Wada and Gratia Williams Nakahashi, *Jewel Rivers: Japanese Art from the Burke Collection* (Richmond, 1993), pp. 45–49. Fong, *Images of the Mind*, pp. 22–27.

17 Sirén, p. 156.

18 Ibid., pp. 158–159.

In the *Wake-Up Sermon*, Bodhidharma, the Indian monk who brought Ch'an to China in the fifth century, writes: "True vision is detached from seeing. The mind and the world are opposite, and vision arises when they meet. When your mind doesn't stir inside, the world doesn't arise outside. When the world and the mind are both transparent, this is true vision."[19] In this statement Li Jih-hua expresses a similar idea:

> The painter must keep his mind open and free from all matters of the world. Then the effects of vapours and clouds and the beauty of the colours will come out spontaneously in accordance with the spirit of Heaven and Earth, and the most wonderful things will take shape under the brush.[20]

According to Noritake Tsuda, a Zen aesthetic rejects elaborate depiction and opts for spontaneity, simplicity and elliptical form.[21] Shifting qualities in form and light are typical of an attention to the fleeting and yet constant presence of things in time and space. Voids in composition establish patterns of emergence and recession. To paint is to set forms in motion. In the seventeenth century, the renowned court painter Tosa Mitsuoki (1617–1691) compared the dynamic presence or "circulation" of spirit in a painted object to "putting eyes into the painting" and defined it in terms that recall Greek and Byzantine views of painting: "'Life's motion' (*ch'i-yün*) means that a painting … contains the spirit of the object and thereby makes the spectator feel as if the object were standing before his eyes … No ordinary artist can transmit such spirit into his work …."[22] Commenting on Mitsuoki's art, Makoto Ueda writes: "Every object has the eyes, or a point that most vitally reflects its inmost nature."[23]

The same vitality is present in the artist. The painter and scholar Ching Hao (c. 870–c. 930) wrote: "Spirit is obtained when your mind moves along with the movement of the brush and does not hesitate in delineating images."[24] The painted object arises in this process spontaneously. The lack of hesitation on the artist's part suggests that the object (and image) is already formed. In *sumiye* the fluidity of ink and the thinness of paper make every move irreversible. Forced to act instantaneously, the painter follows the vital movements of her objects by immersing herself in their natural and plastic life and grasping their "essential spirit," a disposition

[19] Red Pine, *The Zen Teachings of the Bodhidharma* (New York, 1987), p. 55.

[20] Sirén, p. 156. Red Pine, p. 53.

[21] Noritake Tsuda, *A History of Japanese Art: From Prehistory to the Taisho Period* (Tokyo, 2009), p. 161.

[22] Bush and Shih, pp. 13–14. Makoto Ueda, *Literary and Art Theories in Japan* (Ann Arbor, 1967), pp. 136–137.

[23] Ueda, *Literary*, pp. 128–129, 138. On the influence of Chinese painting, calligraphy and aesthetics on Japanese art in the eighteenth century, see Felice Fischer, "Taiga and Landscape Painting: Translations and Transformations," in Felice Fischer and Kyoko Kinoshita (eds.), *Ike Taiga and Tokuyama Gyokuran: Japanese Masters of the Brush* (Philadelphia, 2007), pp. 52–63.

[24] Bush and Shih, p. 170.

that recalls *eusebeia*.[25] The more intense one's observation of things and the more total her immersion in their nature, the livelier the impression they leave.[26]

Perception in such moments is substantive (ontological). The object does not arise in contemplation but in the act of painting (actually in the instant the brush touches the paper's surface). Thus "formal likeness" is typically juxtaposed to "noble vitality" (*ku-ch'i*).[27] This is an important distinction. Likeness can be established either by mere reproduction (an inferior form) or through profound contact with the object's reality or mode of existence. A painting, according to the poet Yang Wei-chen (1296–1370), can show things by "transmission of likeness" or by "transmission of spirit."[28] In spiritual transmission, as in *enargeia*, the image itself is a creative being. It obtains, Wei-chen says, "[the powers] of creation itself."[29] The image is then alive: "a painted cat hung on a wall may stop the rats; a 'Bodhisattva Crossing the Sea' may dispel the wind; a venerable sage or war-god can be prayed to and its voice will answer."[30] The art object in this (exemplary) instance belongs to a higher order of reality. It is transcendent and immanent at the same time. It also has what in Christian terms we would call a plerotic quality. A thing painted with spirit will "transmit the spirit (*ch'uan shen*) that is in all."[31]

This is how Fu Tsai (d. 813) describes an instance of Buddhist cosmophany:

> Ravaging and pulling, spreading in all directions, the ink seemed to be spitting from his flying brush … When he had finished, there stood pine trees, scaly and riven, crags steep and precipitous, clear water and turbulent clouds … It seemed as if the sky had cleared after a storm, to reveal the true essence of ten thousand things … when we contemplate Master Chang's art, it is not painting, it is the very Tao itself.[32]

Before it even settles on paper, the ink assumes the energy and subtle qualities of the natural world it will become. When the painting is complete, it reveals this world in its bare reality. This sense of clarity is consistent with the tranquility of mind that characterizes the meditative mind.

We can explore these ideas in three paintings in ink and silk by Late Edo painter Kano Seisenin Masanobu (1796–1846) (Figure 15.1). Portrayed in the central scroll in their standard form are two emanations of the Zen bodhisattvas Munju Bosatsu (Kanzan) and Fugen Bosatsu (Jittoku). The two men (Ch. Hanshan and Shih-Te) were eccentric monks at Mount Tendai in China during the Tang period. They represent the wisdom and

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25 Ibid., p. 246.
26 Ibid., p. 207.
27 Ibid., p. 54.
28 Ibid., p. 246.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., pp. 131–132.
32 Ibid., p. 85.



15.1 Kano Seisenin Masanobu (1796–1846), *Kanzan, Jittoku and Landscape*, Author's collection

method of Ch'an, signified by the scroll held by Kanzan and the broom and bucket that accompany Jittoku.

The left and right scrolls present views of the distant mountains from different directions. Fading forms of grass, sky, earth, trees and water suggest the tranquility of the landscape. Through the mist and fog, one can see clearly the rising blades of grass and the soil next to water rendered in soft washes of light and dark tones. Tangible and real, the trees and rocks in black ink define the receding horizon where in two of the scrolls rising mountain peaks are barely visible. On the sliding slope of the mountain (left scroll), thick, splashed ink creates areas of lush vegetation against which rooftops and walls are swiftly outlined. All around them, delicate washes, faint lines and empty space create a misty, serene landscape surrounded by a placid void. The two isolated figures in the middle scroll belong by association to this world even though there is very little in the image itself other than the empty space that surrounds them, to suggest that. Like the adjacent landscapes, the scene has a lightness and quiet about it, as if nothing is spoken or heard.

The three paintings appear as moments in nature but not impressionistically. They simply exist in that modality. They do not depict it. Here it makes no sense to think of resemblance or representation. Dominated by an empty

and elusive space that suspends the painting act, these images emerge like *acheiropoietai* through the sheets of mist that they so delicately create. They have a transient presence as if they could disappear from view at any minute. And yet they linger. On the surface, they appear as lively as the portrait of *Eutyches*. But rather than concentrate in a face or figure, this liveliness is here diffused. Neither the houses and cliffs nor the mountains and human figures that inhabit this space are vivid in themselves. Their form and appearance does not belong to them. They show no internal motion of self-manifestation, no act of self-expression that centers in their own individual reality. They simply (and profoundly) exist as manifest moments of the invisible world they inhabit and whose subtle and creative energies they seem to embody and realize.

This passage from the work of Sung critic Tung Yu (twelfth century) is very relevant:

> Those who discuss painting say that hills and valleys had been formed within [Wu Tao-tzu's] breast, so that when he was aroused, they came forth in painting. Therefore, there are no traces of things left behind, yet the scene is produced in accord with what was seen. No doubt his nature was in harmony with external nature … Moreover, if one looks at all living things on earth, they are just the transformations of one vital energy (*chi'i*). Its functioning and modifications are appropriate in each case; no one is conscious of the process, and so it is achieved naturally.[33]

When things subsist in the mind and heart, like interior landscapes, the dualities of subject and object disappear and the image arises on its own accord (like a natural phenomenon). There is no discernible past or time within which form takes shape. It is neither an act (in the objective sense) of nature nor an act (in the subjective sense) of human expression but an instance, both tangible and elusive, of the timeless presence of reality to an encompassing Mind. Thus, what is personal is absorbed by mind and world which give it its distinctive shape. This is cosmophany without personhood or better, it is cosmophany that has internalized personhood.

And yet, we can hear echoes of *eusebeia*. The official and painter Su Shih (1037–1101) likened the painter to a diver (and the sea to the Tao): "In the south there are many divers who live in the water every day. At seven they wade, at ten they can float, and at fifteen they are able to dive … If one lives in water every day, then at fifteen one will grasp its Tao."[34] The art historian Kuo Jo-hsü (c. 1080) attributed the presence of *ch'i-yün* or "animation through spirit consonance" in a painting to a type of "innate knowledge" that is not the result of practice or experience: "it is an unspoken accord, a spiritual communion."[35] The great landscape painter Kuo Hsi (c. 1000–c. 1090) explained: "If all is ordered in detail in your bosom, your eye will not see

33 Ibid., pp. 214–215.
34 Ibid., p. 208.
35 Ibid., p. 95.

the silk and your hand will be unaware of brush and ink, and through the immensity and vastness [of your mind] everything will become your own painting."[36] The same idea of losing one's object in the act of painting it in order to rediscover it as part of an encompassing reality is expressed by Tung Yu in a way that recalls Bodhidharma:

> If one is able to be unconscious of horse and without the hindrance of looking at horses, forms will disappear abruptly as if extinguished and nonexistent. When the complete image is prepared and lodged in one's breast, it will suddenly emerge without one's knowing how it did so. Then prancing and soaring, it will enter the scene on the silk.[37]

As in *eusebeia*, one submits to the being of things totally, to the point where the thing or its appearance in the mind takes over thought and perception. Here we have paradoxical movements: the emptier the image the mind forms, the fuller will be the plastic object that emerges. We are reminded of Maritain's poetic knowledge, where the mind reaches out and connaturally grasps the image or yields to its impression, in a combination of feeling and form—"emotion *as* form" (emphasis added).[38] But here the mind does not enter into the mystery of things. It only receives and registers impressions whose vitality is the result of a cosmic act. There is no God, no intimate conversation, person to person, between artist and being. And yet, as we can see in these aphorisms from Zen practice, the loss of self and object, is no less ascetic (in the way that it eliminates the objects of sense and intellection) and no less mystical (in the way that it reveals an unthematic, open and transcendent reality): "The one perceivable whole is ungraspable," "Being hidden, all the more exposed," "Though the Buddha's eye watches for it, it can't see it," "Call to it without sound, see it without a form," and "Describable, not thus reachable; paintable, but not completely."[39]

We should now briefly consider the place of beauty in Ch'an and Zen theory. Japanese art historians use the concept *yūgen*, translated as elegance, simplicity, lightness, austerity and inner life, to describe the work of art, poetry or theatrical performance that has reached the highest level of refinement and accomplishment. *Ukiyo-e* prints (*bijin-e*) whose subject is female beauty are a reflection of this aesthetic.[40] "Beauty," in the sense of perfect or complete realism in a painting or performance, is associated with artifice in Mitsuoki according to whom "a painting that is too beautiful is weak."[41] Tsuda describes Zen painting in the Muromachi period as guided by the ideal of the

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[36] Ibid., p. 166.

[37] Ibid., p. 215.

[38] Trapani, *Poetry*, p. 47. Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, pp. 119, 117–125.

[39] Zenrin Chido and Robert E. Lewis (eds.), *Zen Grove Handbook* (Jacksonville, 2001), pp. 135, 85, 94, 215, 144.

[40] Taiso Yoshitoshi's (1839–1892) *Fūzoku sanjūnisō*, or "Thirty-two Aspects of Daily Life," is a good example.

[41] Ueda, *Literary*, p. 141.

hidden "beauty or true life of things" but not explicitly as liveliness.[42] Chinese aesthetics identifies three principles that define the concept: conformity or fidelity to the object painted (*ying-wu hsiang-hsing*), proper coloring (*sui-lei fu-ts'ai*) and integral composition (*ching-ying wei-chich*).[43] There is an evident agreement with the scholastic view especially in the components of conformity and integrity. But these, as we have argued for beauty previously, are structural characteristics that help ground *enargeia*. The same happens with *ch'i- yün*. Conformity suggests likeness, a characteristic, as we have seen above, of inferior painting. This distinction can therefore help us sharpen the contrast between beauty and *enargeia*.

In *enargeia*, the image is complete (and as such in a state of rest), but its objects never stop emerging from within. It is an elliptical and open completeness that remains elusive. A ground is implied inside the image which however remains invisible. One cannot open (analyze) the image and find it. What is visible is a subtle motion inside the painted object toward and away from the viewer, a movement of self-containment and self-expansion. This movement, where present, disappears under beauty. The aesthetic object becomes a tableau, an analyzable pattern. This formalization (flattening) reflects an alignment between aesthetic object and the concept that measures it. The alignment may please the mind (as in *pulchritudo placet*), but it creates an image that is rigid and artificial. By contrast, *enargeia* presents the mind with a life-form, with a plastic being which lives its own reality and is therefore always more than it appears to be. This being commands conversation rather than contemplation, engagement rather than passivity, participation rather than detachment. To measure it against a concept is to miss its reality altogether. This is how beauty can be a façade or spectacle (or an idol). The image that has *enargeia* arises out of an unspecified and yet tangible depth. It is measured only against its own being. And it can never fit itself perfectly.

The concept of a thing's inner reality or (*shih*) conveys this idea. As Ching Hao explains in *The Significance of Pines*, the painter who paints without *shih* may succeed in rendering a subject in a life-like manner. But he will not succeed in capturing its *ch'i-yün*: "if spirit is conveyed only through the outward appearance and not through the image in its totality, the image is dead."[44] A painting that has *ch'i-yün* has accomplished much more than beautiful form. This vitality is at the very heart of Zen aesthetics and is expressed in the same paradoxical form that we saw in Digenes, Symeon and in Byzantine *ekphraseis*. But only in Digenes do we see a comparable attention to nature that we find in Zen iconography and poetry.

In Orthodoxy, nature may be holy and its holiness visible in theophany but it is rarely observed with the interest and sensitivity that we find

[42] See Tsuda's discussion of Japanese art in the Meiji-Taishō Era. Tsuda, pp. 161, 274–280.

[43] Sullivan, pp. 106–107.

[44] Bush and Shih, p. 146.

in Chinese and Japanese Buddhist literature. And yet, the idea that in enlightenment all forms are perceived simultaneously, in a state of spontaneous arising, opens perception to a dimension that is consistent with theophany as described by Palamas and others. "None other than Buddhist patriarchs knows that *the opening of flowers is the occurrence of the world*," writes Dōgen in a passage from his famous "*Kuge*" (Flowers in Space) of the *Shōbōgenzō*.[45] The phrase is by Bodhidharma's master Prajñātara and Dōgen is here trying to break out of ordinary conceptual structures in order to illustrate Prajñātara's words: "Not only in spring and in autumn do flowers and fruit exist; existence-time always has flowers and fruit. Every flower and fruit has maintained and relied upon a moment of time, and every moment of time has maintained and relied upon flowers and fruit."[46]

Grasping the flower's subsistence in time opens perception to that moment's transtemporal reality. Time anywhere and everywhere carries flowers. It is inseparable from their being what they are at any given moment—a moment in which their existence comes to be and becomes a perceived reality. Conversely, time is carried by all the flowers that have ever existed and will ever exist. Rather than make this a contemplative truth or the subject of a philosophical query, Zen opts to perceive it. A flower's time, the time of a flower, time as flower, flower in time, and so on are ways of capturing in language fragments of what in perception is a total experience: "the time of the moon is not always night, and night is not always dark. Do not limit yourself to narrow human consideration. There may be day or night even where there is no sun or moon."[47]

In the eleventh century, the painter Chai Yuan-shen was caught playing his drum off beat in a performance of his home orchestra. When summoned to explain what happened, he said: "At the time in question I was pounding away at my drum when all at once I caught sight of a cloud mounting into an extraordinary mountain peak [formation], just made to be the model for a painting."[48] The painter and critic Ching Hao likewise wrote of the cypress tree: "It is luxuriant but not showy. Its trunk has many knots and is clearly sectioned. Its twisting patterns grow so as to follow the movement of the sun. Its leaves are (rugged) like knotted threads and its branches are [angular] like hemp clothes [on the body]."[49]

The great landscapist Kuo Hsi explained the importance of insightful observation and abstraction in rendering the essence of seasonal landscapes:

> Clouds and vapors in a real landscape differ through the four seasons. They are genial in spring, profuse in summer, sparse in autumn, and somber in winter.

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45 Dōgen, pp. 13, 8.
46 Ibid., p. 9.
47 Ibid., p. 2.
48 Bush and Shih, p. 121.
49 Ibid., p. 147.

If a painting shows the major aspects and doesn't create overly detailed forms, then the prevailing attitude of clouds and vapors will appear alive. … Spring mountains are gently seductive and seem to smile. Summer mountains seem moist in their verdant hues. Autumn mountains are bright and clear, arrayed in colored garments. Winter mountains are withdrawn in melancholy, apparently asleep.[50]

Hsi also wrote on more technical matters: "The coloring of wind may be achieved through yellow earth and dust ink. The coloring of earth is obtained through light ink and dust ink. The coloring of stone is obtained through combining blue and black ink in different shades." A minimum number of lines and washes should be used to create the impression of an actual, live landscape: "Achieve the effect of waterfalls by leaving the plain silk bare and simply using scorched ink to indicate the sides."[51]

In this poem by Liu Tao-shun (c. 1059), nature comes alive in the way that holy persons came alive in the Byzantine *ekphraseis*:

As for T'ung's painting style, above protrude eminent peaks, below one gazes into bottomless ravines, of a majestic gravity and strength that T'ung was able to bring out with one brush stroke. Their prominent forms burst forth as if gushing out. And further more, everything was complete in the somber vastness—the bluish green of peaks and cliffs, soil and rocks in groves and foothills, as well as land areas into the level distance and mountain paths remote and cut off, bridges and planks, hamlets and villages—hence the praise and esteem of his contemporaries.[52]

This poem by Zen Master Goso Ho-en (c. 1024–1104) has been praised by Dōgen:

The north wind mixes with snow and shakes the valley forest.
Though the myriad things have sunk under cover,
Regret is not deep.
The only presence is the mountain plum trees,
which are full of spirit.
Before December they are already spewing the mind for all the
coldness of the year.[53]

Here, time is inseparable from the mountain, plum, wind and snow and the inevitable advent of the seasons. Dōgen comments: "A bit of the virtue of the plum blossoms, mixed with the north wind, has become the snow." The blossoms have the power to create the wind, snow and "the myriad things of the valley forest."[54] In the eyes of the poem they are grasped in their creative act of existence. They are not just blossoms or plum but a miniature universe in which the reader's (and viewer's) senses participate.

50 Ibid., p. 152.
51 Ibid., p. 180.
52 Ibid., p. 116.
53 Dōgen, p. 151.
54 Ibid.

Dōgen wrote that in the image that exists as an instance of enlightenment "'being like' does not express resemblance; being like is concrete existence."[55] This, as we have seen earlier, is also a sense that is preserved in the Greek term *eikon* and in the image that has *enargeia*. As in theophany, enlightenment opens vision so wide that one can actually watch things emerge and appear from what seems to be an ever expanding horizon. In theophany, a visible yet unrecognizable light permeates all things which bask in its presence oblivious to and yet filled with their own individual realities—and thus free, at least in that moment, of the struggle to be what they are that defines their fallen existence. In enlightenment, all tangible forms disappear (even that of the Buddha) only to intimate their presence at the very moment that they vanish from view.

The Chinese patriarch of the Japanese Rinzai sect, Linji (ninth century), said to a disciple: "When you realize that causation is empty, mind is empty, phenomena are empty, when your single thought is set to cut off, transcendent and you have nothing further to do, this is called 'burning the sutras and the Buddha's image'."[56] But in this emptiness one may find alternative worlds and realities. Thus, it is possible for a hair to "swallow the great ocean" or a mustard seed to "contain Mount Sumeru" [the mythical mountain and center of the universe in Buddhist cosmology].[57] In such moments, nature's mysterious plenitude and self-transcending presence affects persons by enveloping them in its own reality. Whether it is Kanzen and Jittoku or images of the Bodhidharma serenely riding a reed-leaf in the midst of a boundless ocean, or one of the many Zen patriarchs and eccentrics sitting quietly on a cliff by moonlight, nature is never absent.[58] It exists within the forms that bodies and faces assume, imparting on them a sense of time and place that transcends contingent human existence. Even when they stand alone, things are never complete in themselves but remain open, outlined against an empty space that makes them seem like floating figures or shapes in a transient world. To those for whom the thusness of things is more compelling than their conventional existence (the object of desire, pleasure and delusion), life has a certain solitude and form becomes hollow the very moment that it seems full and ready to capture consciousness. It should not surprise us, then, that when compared to an icon of Christ or of a saint, a Bodhidharma is never a complete shape, never a finalized figure.

Figure 15.2 is a picture of Bodhidharma (Daruma) painted by Ienaga Ichido (1893–1951) who was abbot of the important Rinzai temple Tofuku-ji, in Kyoto. Part of the inscription reads "Don't know," which is Daruma's anwer to the question "Who are you?" With bulging eyes and forehead, and

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55 Ibid., p. 2.

56 Rinzai (Linji), *The Book of Rinzai: The Recorded Sayings of Zen Master Rinzai (Linji) Rinzai Roku*, trans. Eido Shimano (New York, 2005), p. 85.

57 Ibid., p. 95.

58 An evocative painting of this theme ascribed to Indra in Suzuki, *Essays*, vol. 3, p. 177 (Plate 18).

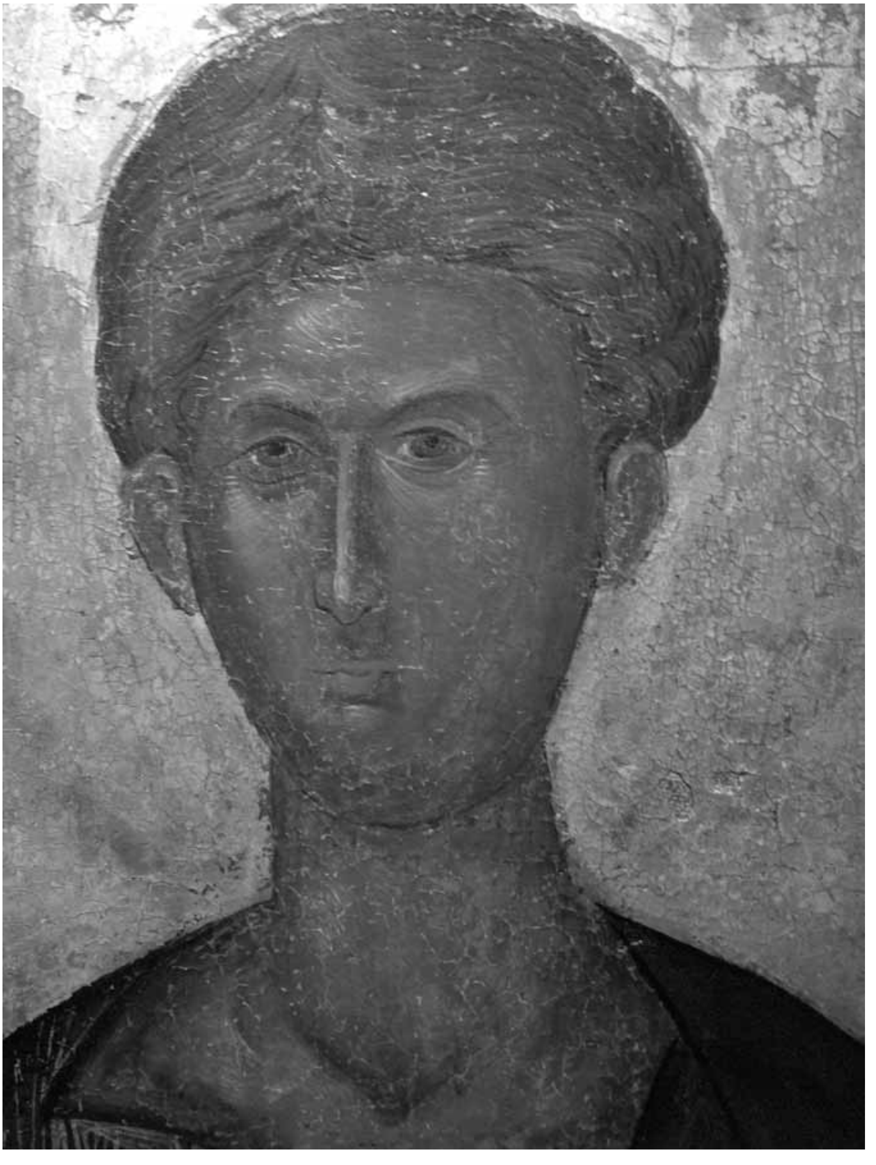


15.2 Ienaga Ichido (1893–1951), *Daruma*, Author's collection

an open, fixated stare, the figure is outlined in bold and fine lines and its expression forms mainly out of the eyes, mouth and thick eyebrows. The soft brush strokes that outline his forehead nestle what seems a fragile head and figure. The man's old age is evident in his sagging, yet resolute jaw. There is little more that we can tell about its subject. Nothing about it is final. Its concise and open form gives it a sense of lightness and ease. The image seems to capture an instance of mind in the life of the figure which stands absorbed in something invisible and yet fully present in its expression and posture.

The *Apostle* (Figure 15.3) appears solid and tangible by comparison. If we think of the worlds that these two figures inhabit, that of *Daruma* is plain and simple: the old man stares into nothing; he has nothing to say. He just exists in that moment in time in which his old head, protruding jaw and cloak make him a monk, a man or simply someone (perhaps even no one). In the Greek icon, the man's gaze has a quality of intense stillness and quiet. His world is one in which this kind of expression on a human face is possible: a world of watchful solitude in which words are spoken even in silence and where beings present themselves out of their own reality, out of a depth that they possess but cannot fully externalize. There is no empty space here; only a tangible light that has become thoroughly humanized and taken the eloquent form of the human flesh, the concentrated plenitude of the sanctified mind, and the resonance of a person's life.

Images with *enargeia* may belong to different worlds but they have one thing in common: inside them something always moves beyond the image, as if to present it or bring it to life. In Zen art, persons become vital by existing in a moment in time that somehow makes them be what they are. In this respect they do not differ from nature. Like mountains and streams, or drying bamboo shoots, they are not in and of themselves alive. In the Christian image, by contrast, it is the object itself that contains this energy and draws from it to become what it is. The *logoi* of beings reveal their innermost reality, and that is what the ascetic who has acquired *eusebeia* can actually see. But humility has many



15.3 *The Apostle Thomas*, mid. 14th century, Holy Metropolis of Thessaloniki, Greece

forms. Those who dive into the Tao or enter the realm of *Prajnā* will see an ocean in a hair or a mountain in a leaf—an act of cosmic humility in which the great inheres in the small (in scale or volume) and all distinctions between them momentarily disappear.

Having looked briefly at the iconography of this particular school of Buddhism, it is easier to understand the Russian avant-gardes who sought for their paintings the elusive vitality they saw in the empty spaces and abstract forms of "Oriental" art. Regarding possibilities for further study, it should be obvious that there are plenty. We may open theophany to the empty spaces of *sumiye* and to those epiphanies of nature that the Orthodox

icon somehow misses. Or, we may let color fields like Rothko's generate their own instances of rain, mist and moving clouds that captured the imagination of so many Chinese artists. We may also press the ambient *logoi* of beings beyond their perceptible contours, to discover a form of *eusebeia* that is the mark of all life rather than of the ascetic alone.

Dōgen's phrase "the time of the moon is not always night" should lead us to reflect on those moments in the existence of things when their *logoi* become fluid and their boundaries tenuous. We can envision the Orthodox image opening itself to poetry (extant or new) and to theotic moments in nature that rival in vitality the transcendent and yet so immanent mind-world of the Zen painting. Nothing in Orthodox theology, as we have presented it in this study, prevents the iconographer from taking these paths. In fact, as long as she remains immersed in tradition, like the divers of Su Shih who know the sea by swimming its waters, there is nothing better for her to do.

Epilogue

This study has argued for the recognition in the exemplary icon and work of art of a characteristic modality that brings it to a state of hypostatic existence, a condition associated since Greek antiquity with the term *enargeia*. Our study of *enargeia* in the Christian image has taken an aesthetic and theological direction, a necessary prerequisite, as we have just shown with Zen precepts and painting, for any aesthetics concerned with the distinctiveness of the religious work of art both as an individual and as an iconographic type. We have opted for clarity where clarity was possible and due, but have also refrained from bringing the theophanic image under a rigid, closed formula, preferring instead to leave its specific form(s) to art and tradition.

In drawing an analogy between persons and exemplary images, we are aware that we are working with a Christian view of the human person which emphasizes self-transcending identity, self-expressive action, self-determination and inherent dignity, qualities that as we have suggested take an aesthetic form in the *enargic* image. The analogy, I would suggest, not only is central to Christian art but helps redefine the way that we relate any art object to subjectivity. The relationship between the two remains superficial and arbitrary as long as the work of art does not become like its maker, a being capable of self-determination and self-expression and yet irreducible to the temporal forms taken by its expressive acts. Here, as with persons, we have recognized an invisible ground in the exemplary work of art from where and to where these acts originate and return—the movement itself being essential to the work's integrity or dignity. Thus, if persons matter in art, both in terms of its creation and in terms of its experience, they matter to the extent that like them, the work of art has a radical freedom from temporal determination, from subservience to the temporalities, spatialities and rhetorics of a *subject* (e.g., artist, viewer, patron), be it individual or collective. Our examination of images that resemble persons in this respect, has shown that this radical freedom is entirely compatible with the presence in the image of the artist's personality. This modality is also active, as we have seen, in the saint.

From an aesthetic point of view, the relationship between *enargeia* and beauty has not been explored to the depth that the latter deserves given its significance in Christian aesthetics. This is a subject that we hope to address in the future and that we see more expressly related to a discussion of the *theotic* image considered from the standpoint of Roman Catholic theology and art. Our objective has been to put the study of Christian art in a new key by centering it on the concept of *theosis*, and to expand our theological and aesthetic vocabulary in order to engage the exemplary images of Orthodox Christianity. Our turn to Modernism in this context may be viewed as dated by those who would have liked to see us engage contemporary art from Post-Modernism onward. But as with the case of beauty, our purpose was to clear the ground and show how Catholic and Orthodox circles have misunderstood Modernism. By establishing a dialogical rather than adversarial relationship between theology and this significant period in Western art, we hope to have set a precedent for considering subsequent developments in the same light.

Similarly, readers may find our study of the Zen image too cursory, considering its range and variety. Our focus has indeed been narrow and concerns only the intersection of aesthetic and religious dimensions in these works rather than their complex histories and social contexts. As we have shown, Chinese art theory and Buddhist painting in the Ch'an and Zen traditions consistently present a view of the art object that is very similar to views associated with *enargeia* in Greece and Byzantium and echoed in the experience of icons recorded in *ekphraseis*. This common ground becomes even more interesting when the fundamental differences between Ch'an Buddhism and Christianity are taken into account. The outlining of these differences is in my view crucial if we are to respect the distinctive character and particularity of artistic and religious traditions and resist the tendency to reduce them to a facile universality. In fact, the sharper the form these differences take, the more lucid the points of convergence, the more exciting the comparison and dialogue, and the more fruitful the outcome. In what remains of this study, I would like to return to this conversation, picking up from where we left off in the last chapter.

The *sumiye* painting that forms in an instant has a lightness and brevity that keeps the reasoning mind at bay. It is not possible to plan or interpret as one paints. The image is not open to explanation or speculation. It does not reveal a trajectory of intentions that it brings to completion. One may train for years in order to paint pine trees, but the moment the brush touches the paper, there is no memory, no "pine tree" and no room for deliberation (and thus no artist and no art). Once formed, the image is either received as it is or not at all. *Sumiye* is realistic since in Zen this is how things in the world happen: we catch them in a glimpse, fully but never firmly. In order to see them as they truly are we have to make seeing an impersonal act: remove the self from the scene and the plum blossom will be seen in its absolute form (but never conceptually, in its "essence").

The rhythms of nature and those of painting (or poetry and calligraphy) are the same. Every moment in the bamboo's life has its plenitude and every moment is also empty since it will never be that way again. Zen has its own eternity to which things open their being entirely and become fluid and transient. The Orthodox ascetic, the *hesychast* who has entered the divine life, also encounters an open world. But here eternity belongs to all individually. Seen in their theotic existence, the tree, the rain and the flower are microcosms in which inhere spiritual virtues. They have their own mystical lives that are obvious to the ascetic but invisible to the ordinary mind. Humility in a cyclamen differs from humility in a child's gesture or expression. A flower's purity and that of a human heart exist in different frequencies and forms.

Spiritual vision has discernment because it has humility. It does not sweep things under concepts but goes to each one of them individually and listens or watches *neptically* for their distinctive sounds and sights. In that moment, as we have seen in Maximus, one sees with reverence, without a centering self and yet with one's full senses and mind present. This is also where vision becomes aesthetic because, as in Zen, we get to see from inside the intimate lives of things. We enter deep into the dynamics of their form and find there the expressive powers that resonate with human emotion and experience. It is a form of descent or burial (*taphe*), to recall the way that Maximus described the intellect's loss of its ordinary life (and perception) in asceticism.

The image that has internalized this movement can stand on its own. It does not resemble anything and it does not represent anything. It exists beyond likeness because its act of being itself is an act of self-realization. This is at the core of *enargeia* and the point where the concept parts ways with beauty. The exemplary icon also has its moments. But they are not moments of dispersion as in Zen painting where beings dissolve in the atmosphere and never possess their form. They are, rather, moments of concentration and intense expression, in which the life of the thing painted takes over its form, inheres in it, and brings it to a state of perpetual presence. Time is absorbed by the image which possesses it entirely, containing it within its own space and life. This is how an icon comes alive, because it has absorbed and arrested what is transient in things and distilled it in a face, in a gesture or, as Theophanes reminds us, in the open wings of an angel and the effulgent blade of a knife resting on a mystical table.

There exist icons that open themselves to theophany in the same way, by making luminosity a state of being, an expressive act rather than a quality in things (a highlight or tonality). This explains why the frescos of Theophanes have a fleeting quality and a sketchy simplicity. The angels have just materialized. They have carved their form out of a light that leaves few shadows because it is in every thing's nature to receive it. Weightless and cautious, they sit at the table, cut the loaf of bread and fold their wings—except for the one in the center who has yet to settle or contain himself in that space.

In his film *Andrei Rublev* (1969), Andrei Tarkovsky has a final sequence that resonates with this aesthetic. It is shot in color and reveals the icons with which the identity of the painter and Saint is inextricably tied. Passing over a number of Rublev icons and frescos, the camera slowly "enters" the icon of *The Savior*. The sense is one of proximity, intimacy and anticipation. The camera here is tactile, as if it climbs the panel softly on its hands (rather than eyes). When he appears, he is like Theophanes' angels. Out of the image, he brings himself to the point where the eye can see him and touch him. He is intimate and yet distant, as if the face that he puts forward is his to withdraw at any moment and his also to reveal forever. He has the consistency of light and color. He is an icon and a man present. He is an image and the one who brings the image to life: who "iconizes" himself.

I am tempted to say that in these and other icons, art has surpassed what discursive theology has said about the mystical life. It has reached a level of tangible holiness that only the saint can muster. Just as the saint theologizes by simply lighting a candle, watering his garden, offering the visitor to his cell a glass of water, or by his silence, so too these icons theologize. As we have been suggesting all along, they are, like the Saints, exceptional beings. They live lives of tranquil obscurity in the midst of an art and a theology that are often too busy with their thoughts to pay attention. Celebrated as masterpieces, they hide behind these labels and worldly distinctions. Like all living things, they have an inherent fragility and yet they are also profoundly resilient. *Enargeia* is delicate and one who looks for "art" or a "message" or "holiness" will most certainly miss it. The analogy to the miraculous icon remains valid, I think, because there too, one must simply receive what is given rather than seek to explain it or deconstruct it.

If there is a problem with the contemporary scholarship of the icon that finds various types of deconstruction so attractive, it is the discursive vision that dominates it. With it comes an unwillingness to see aesthetically, as if this way of approaching the world and art (and God) is too basic, too innocent and uninteresting to minds that are overflowing with words and ideas. Why stand still when one can run? And yet, as in Zen, so too in Orthodoxy, it is stillness that opens the way to the perception of transcendent realities in art and life. The painter of the Paestum diver knew this well (Color Plate 1; Figure 12.1). If Japanese poetry, painting, calligraphy and theater are forms of religion, it is because at the center of their practice is a tranquil mind that allows things to emerge from obscurity (or delusion).[1] In Christianity, this obscuration affects perception in the state of sin, when the world disappears because man will only see himself (and his ideas) in it. Modernists like Kandinsky and Malevich who looked for abstraction through concepts ended up losing painting. Those who like Picasso, Chagall and Rothko, looked for it in the being of things, pushed painting beyond representation and "art," and at times made it more profound.

[1] Ueda, *Literary*, pp. 67–68, 70–71, 184–185, 235–236.

Enargeia does not belong exclusively to Orthodoxy, but one of its forms does. To see depth and movement in color and to paint it or photograph it in that way, is not by itself a spiritual act. It becomes spiritual when it arises out of an Orthodox or a Buddhist cosmos where it assumes the subtle frequencies of the life-forms that exist there. A world living on the verge of transcendence, in the midst of an eternity that God himself has made tangible for humanity, is aesthetically different from one in which eternity is mediated only by human consciousness. Here perhaps lies a major difference between Orthodoxy and Zen Buddhism.

In Orthodoxy, the image grows out of the ways that lines, colors and shapes co-inhere with acts of fasting, lighting candles or standing for hours in vigils and quietly breathing the Jesus Prayer. Words also paint. Addressed to a personal God, they bring a resonance of personhood to things (and to language) that is absent from a world in which this conversation has never taken place. It is not difficult then to see the image that has *enargeia* emerge spontaneously as if it were in that aspect of its existence something of a miracle, an image made without human hands. Of course it is not, if by miracle we understand the radical discontinuity or disruption of nature rather than its fulfillment in grace. Theophany does not bring rupture and ecstasy to the ascetic (only to the novice). *Enargeia* does not break out in flashes of expression. The angels sitting at the table in the Theophanes fresco are barely there, but their presence is as eloquent as that of the knife, plate and bread in which the divine glory has awakened a luminous and joyful existence.

In Orthodox iconography, nature is not always as intimately engaged in the divine life as are persons and, in some instances, objects. This perhaps is an area where the comparison with the Zen image can open new possibilities for Orthodox iconography. The same, as we have noted, applies to poetry. This too should be explored in a similar vein, as it seems unnatural to confine languages (Greek especially) so deeply involved in poetry and theology for centuries, to liturgy and worship. The Orthodox poem that is not only a hymn but assumes in its own modality, poetically, the life of holiness and prayer, and theologizes by form as well as content, will have its own exemplarity and its own type of *enargeia*. Poetry may resemble painting in the visual intensity of its imagery, and its ability for brevity, ambiguity and movement, but it has its own visual logic and unique rhythms. It is therefore wise, I think, to let it grow out of tradition and emerge spontaneously, like the exemplary icon, as a theological being in its own right.

The tendency to pack too much in the icon and the poem, to load them with theological significance is inconsistent with the profound sense of tradition that Lossky so eloquently describes. It is in the incompleteness of things, in their elliptical appearance that we may intuit their mystical lives and resonating fullness. The theophanic icon has sparsity and void in its form. It subsists "in part" (*ek merous*) in order to reveal in ever incomplete moments of being a deeper ground from where an elusive fullness arises. It cannot be complete, finalized and closed but must move toward a fullness of

which it is the expression, but with which it can never, qua image, be equated. The challenge posed by Iconoclasm centuries ago has been met by these extraordinary icons. They show how an image can participate in the divine life rather than imitate it. That it can do so aesthetically, in its own life, rather by induction in holy spaces and holy acts. In the presence of these theophanic beings, it makes little sense to turn to the world of ritual and performance in order to give the icon life.

There are on the Holy Mountain of Athos and elsewhere in the Orthodox world ascetics who live lives of holiness. They speak the terse language of the Desert Fathers (*Gerondika*) where, according to the Orthodox tradition, theology begins and ends. This terseness comes from years of silent prayer and obedience to an Elder, communion in the holy mysteries, fasting, humility and discernment. Their words have a life of their own, as those who heed them discover. Sometimes they are not words; they are simply gestures. But they cut through one's mind and heart, as if speech were a form of spiritual surgery and the ascetic a physician of souls. The nature of theology becomes then all too transparent and intimate to one's life. It is the same with exemplary icons. Orthodox aesthetics begins and ends there, in the world that these icons open and the mystical lives that they encompass in their intimate space. Like the ascetic's words of counsel, exemplary icons enter theology and awaken it to its true life.

To approach the icon in this manner is to approach it within Orthodox tradition. It may be argued that this approach does not allow one sufficient detachment or "objectivity." But this distinction, as we have seen, loses its meaning when the icon is taken as a life-form. To get to know the exemplary icon and the saint is to put ideas aside until we learn to follow, watch and listen. One who returns from such a journey to the theology of Maximus, Symeon and Palamas, or to the arguments of theologians and philosophers about Christian art, knows what it is that she is looking for. The argument must lead to the icon and the saint, not to the concept and the author. In the same way, Orthodox tradition teaches, theology must lead to God.

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